At the cold war peripheries : reimagining nation in contemporary sinophone and anglophone Malaysian literature

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**AT THE COLD WAR PERIPHERIES:
REIMAGINING NATION IN CONTEMPORARY
SINOPHONE AND ANGLOPHONE MALAYSIAN
LITERATURE**

SHOW YING XIN

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2016

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets out to read contemporary Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian literature, in which the writers and artists project their national imaginaries within the interstices of a monocultural nationalist regime during the context of the Cold War. Particularly, it condemns the neo-liberalist stance that many postcolonial scholars have taken to celebrate the “transnational”, “postnational” or “diasporic” identity. Instead, it argues that the “nation-state” is alive as a contested space where different power struggles negotiate their national imaginaries within and beyond it. In so doing, it uses the method of relative comparison to bring up the communication between two linguistic spheres. It then examines them as “minor literature”, in Deleuze and Guattari’s term, looking for what Glissant calls, the “poetics of Relation” in the fiction. On the one hand, it refuses to see Malaysian literature through the dominant protocols of an ethnic paradigm, which allude to the logic of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Instead, it seeks to “delink” ethnicity and language and calls for attention to the multilingual and multicultural realities in Malaysia. On the other hand, it emphasises the importance of recognizing two “lacunas” in Malaysian history – the first that takes place in 1948, when the Malayan Emergency began and the second in 1969, when the May 13 events took place – because they have since hijacked this crucial period and have delayed an in-depth reflection of the effects of colonialism and imperialism in Malaysia.

These key moments in the Cold War allow, what Giorgio Agamben calls, a “state of exception” to function, in which the state mechanism both suspend *and* enforce the rule of law at the same time. As a result, I contended that Malaysia has yet to undergo a genuine decolonization. In this regard, this dissertation situates itself at the Cold War peripheries where Malay(si)a stands in the global Cold War structure, and excavates the historical memories that contemporary writers and filmmakers delineate in their artistic works. It thus draws upon the aesthetic *and* political mentalities of the works of literature to showcase the power-relation network that has been shaped by the Cold War.

Keywords: Cold War, communists, Sinophone Malaysian literature, Anglophone Malaysian literature, postcolonial studies, state of exception, nation, poetics of Relation, May 13 racial riots

Chapter One: Introduction

I. Background: Overcoming the Ethnic Paradigm

As a Chinese Malaysian who was educated in a non-Malay education system (I studied in a Chinese primary school and Chinese independent secondary school) and who later pursued university studies in Taiwan, I have always been reminded that racial discrimination happens in our daily lives. I was told that, since the 1969 racial riot¹, “*Ketuanan Melayu*” (Malay dominance) has been upheld by the state apparatus, one that affirms the supremacy status of the Malays and excludes non-Malay tribes from participating in the construction of a national cultural identity. As a member of an ethnic “minority” which constitutes around 24% of the population, it seems that I was doomed to be a “victim” in Malaysia. In fact, what significantly changed Malaysia were not simply the riots, but the government policies that followed after. A state of Emergency was soon declared and the National Operations Council (NOC) ruled Malaysia for two years until 1971, when Tun Abdul Razak replaced Tunku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister. Already in 1967, the National Language Act had been passed to confirm the privileged status of Malay language, or *Bahasa Malaysia* (once called *Bahasa Melayu*). After the riots, more aggressive policies

¹ In the 1969 General Elections, opposition parties caused the ruling Alliance to lose its two-thirds majority in the Parliament for the first time. Unfortunately, post-election celebrations had been turned into a racially-coloured uprising in Kuala Lumpur. From May 13, 1969 to weeks after, death toll rose to 196 with most of the victims Chinese as officially declared (NOC 85), though many perceived the number to be more than 2000 (Parker 6).

were carried out to affirm the *Bumiputra* (sons of the soil) status of Malays. For example, the infamous New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1971, which aimed to eradicate economic imbalance among races, but is in effect a more drastic and radical regime of hegemony, one that deepens ethnic segregation. The 1971 National Cultural Policy, which promoted “Malay supremacy” culture and literature, announced that literature written in non-Malay language, namely Chinese, English, Tamil etc. were considered “sectional literature”, and could not stand under the umbrella of “National literature”. In other words, they were delimited as minority literatures in the context of Malaysia. Moreover, the communalist policies were propagated as means of upholding national unity enshrined in the *Rukun Negara* (National Ideology).

Bearing that in mind, this research project originally intended to deal with “post-1969” Malaysian literature that address the works of ethnic minorities produced in the aftermath of the 1969 May 13 racial riots. In academic discourse, I have noticed a trend of examining non-Malay literature, either in ethnic or linguistic terms, from the perspective of a minority, if not through a voice of victimology. Over time, I found this phenomenon rather problematic, as it overlooks other repressed voices, such as class, and also arguably fights racism with racism. In other words, this approach still constrains readers within the logic of post-1969 state-sanctioned communalist narrative, or what I call the “ethnic paradigm”. As the Malaysian political economist Hua Wu Yin puts it, the

politics of imperialist dominion put forward by the ruling class through communalism is:

[t]he division of the masses along national lines in order to prevent them from acting as a unified political force. The form of this domination has been organized, on the one hand around the denial of democratic rights to the minority nationalities—the Chinese and the Indians—and on the other, around the mobilization of the Malay masses behind the demand of correcting the “racial imbalance” of the economy. The latter, obscures the relations of class exploitation by portraying economic inequalities as the product of unequal distribution among the national groups. (Hua 2)

In other words, by adopting communalist policies under the guise of maintaining economic balance, the ruling class strives to conceal class exploitation and promote a capitalist strategy of distribution. Social scientist and human-rights activist Kua Kia Soong pushes this notion even further by deconstructing the 1969 ethnic paradigm to argue that the May 13 incident was above all “a coup d’etat by the then emergent Malay state capitalist class to depose the Tunku who represented the outdated Malay aristocracy” (Kua 3). In other words, it was an orchestrated political conspiracy done by the representative of the new Malay

state capitalist class—Tun Razak, who headed the NOC during the Emergency, to further facilitate radical right-wing policies.

As a matter of fact, rightist state policy has been in effect since independence, but it was in 1969 that the state seized the opportunity during the Emergency to put forward a “New Malaysia” agenda. Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben has called this kind of political order a “state of exception”, in which the application of law is suspended in a “lacuna” in order to guarantee the “existence” of the law (Agamben 31). To put it simply, the state of exception is “an anomic space in which what is at stake is *a force of law without law*” (39; emphasis added). In such a way, the paralysis of state mechanism is in turn a means of enforcing the power of state mechanism. And it is in the lacuna so created that state power hijacked critical discussion on issues, navigating the dominant discourse to follow their favourite direction. As for the case of Malaysia, the Emergency was an efficient means of the ruling party to create this state of exception, where the normal rule of law was suspended.

Without recognizing the structural “lacuna” that shapes the political order, it is hard to get a clear grasp of how the state ruling class “negotiates” these manifold power struggles. In fact, 1969 was not the only key moment that allowed the state of exception to function, the year 1948 was also crucial. Both the lacunas were allowed to be shaped with the help of the Cold War. For paradoxically, the independence of Malaya in 1957 was in fact attained at the height of Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) during the Cold War. In their anti-

communist war, the British joined hands with right-wing Malay aristocrats to wipe out local communist forces, and the ruling power was then “granted” the opportunity by the British to form the right-wing alliance of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) on 31 August 1957. Moreover, the calling for an establishment of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, which included the British protectorates Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah), was also part of British neo-colonial plan to create an “anti-communist bulwark” (Ooi K.G. 117). As such, it is not an exaggeration to claim that the independence of the Federation of Malaya and the establishment of Malaysia were both products of the Cold War.

Similarly, what “racialised” the lacuna of 1948 during the state of exception was the propaganda that the communists were all Chinese, despite the fact Malays, especially the rural Malay masses, also formed an important part of the party². As a whole, this racialised historiography and narrative has dominated our understanding of contemporary Malaysian history. And with the help of the Cold War, leftist struggles and class problems have been completely concealed in favour of the hegemonic discourse deployed by the state Malay capitalist class. Thus, it is important to return to the two crucial moments, 1948 and 1969, to shine light on the pertinent power struggles and on parties excluded

² See, for example, Mohamed Salleh Lamry “A History of the Tenth Regiment’s Struggles”, and Syed Husin Ali “Working notes on the Malaysian Left”.

and marginalized by the state of exception. It is important to lift the veil covering this ambiguous “lacuna” created by the playing of race cards.

In fact, discussions of the May 13 incident always focus on race and nothing else, not even on the fact that the communists were accused by the then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman of being conspirators (Tunku, *May 13* 195). During the Cold War period, there was speculation that China was supporting and fostering Southeast Asian Chinese to create communist groups to challenge colonial power and western influence. Subsequently, during the 1969 election, the ruling government claimed that the opposition parties, especially the Chinese-dominated ones, were mostly influenced by communist ideology and were associated with the MCP. Tunku Abdul Rahman said: “Communist China is the force behind the disloyal Chinese elements in Malaysia. I know that they are helping too the Malay parties opposed to UMNO.” (Tunku, *May 13* 195). Furthermore, after the two-year Emergency, the NOC was dissolved, and the new government created the National Security Council to continue dealing with communist “insurgency” (Cheong 101).

The stirrings of politics in the Cold War period reveals the struggles of people from different camps trying to imagine “modern” Malay(si)a on their own terms. This intellectual exercise continues to have an impact on contemporary Malaysians. However, this part of history remains underexplored in the academic field due to the (in)voluntary silencing enacted by the Cold War in Malaysia (Chua 232-33). The communists are labelled insurrectionists and

nothing else, the history and efforts of various leftists groups fighting for social justice have been covered up for “national security reasons”. And more pertinently, all important issues have been shrouded by the seemingly one-and-only problem in the nation, which is “race”. Racial issues have occupied the main place in historical and political discourse, not only by the intentional state apparatus, but also by ethnic minority groups who fight for their rights. For a long time, racial issues have taken precedence over all other problems, and the May 13 symbol continues to be used as a scaremongering tactic by the still-incumbent coalition, which claims that racial riots will break out again - as in May 13, 1969 - if “race” matters are not prioritised. In other words, the two periods where a “state of exception” (or a state of emergency) prevailed have resulted in two historical “lacunas”, and these have in turn navigated us to confront only the ethnic paradigm without probing into deeper structural problems.

In this regard, many works of literature have been written to examine identity politics in Malaysia and the institutionalization of Malay hegemony. Post-1969 literary works also deal with inter-ethnic relationships marked by shadow of the riot, such as those written by Sinophone writer Li Zishu and Anglophone writer Preeta Samarasan. Both writers have written novels set against the May 13 incident in order to grapple with the identity formation of ethnic minorities (both Chinese and Indians) in post-1969 Malaysia. However, many writers and critics still see the other races as “the Other”, thus preventing

genuine inter-cultural dialogue, and essentialising the different groups, as if each culture has a set of fixed values that never changes and is not impacted by history.

Similarly, literary criticisms in the post-1969 era have targeted Malay sovereignty and hegemony. I am not proposing that this is an inaccurate concern, as racial discrimination *is* an undeniable fact in Malaysia. The problem is, I argue, many important issues that require further academic discussion have been covered up and side-lined in favour of considering racial problems. For example, ideological struggles during the Cold War were silenced because the US-dominated capitalist discourse seemed to be the only legitimate one; postcolonial/neo-colonial situation in Malaysia has never been deeply probed into, and the unsolved problems generated by them continue to have their effects on contemporary issues. And behind these problems, the manifold effects of the Cold War continue to define a subject of discourse for writers to ponder upon. When it surfaces in their works, the topics of “nationhood,” “modernity,” “May 13,” “communism,” “Chinese identity,” and so on are arguably “inquiries” into or explorations of global Cold War politics as it pertains to Malaysia. I will return to this claim in the third section of this Introduction.

In my reading of the chosen texts in this dissertation, I also take note of the identity politics issues that are defined by Malay sovereignty, though I tend not to see it as the *cause*, but as the *medium*. I see it as a conceptualized idea that is modified by local and global political causes. I look at it as a medium for the

ruling power to play the race card to hinder communication, and as a tool to legitimize their exercise of power/knowledge. As Foucault rightly points out,

power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression...on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge...It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible. The fact that power is so deeply rooted and the difficulty of eluding its embrace are effects of all these connections. That is why the notion of repression which mechanisms of power are generally reduced to strikes me as very inadequate and possibly dangerous. (Foucault 59)

In other words, all sorts of narratives are subjected to the enactment of power and epistemic orders. The manifold relations of power that produce knowledge and continue to construct society need to be further problematized and questioned. Thus, I see them in relation and connection, instead of singling out one particular phenomenon. As Malaysian social-scientist Farish A. Noor puts it, what seems to be lacking in historical narratives of Southeast Asia is a “deconstructive account of history, i.e. a history that demonstrates and even

highlights the constructiveness of history and historical identities” (Farish 250). This is possibly why, I argue, many Malaysian fiction writers choose to return to the particular periods of lacunas (1940s to 1960s) in their knowledge production, where the Cold War conflicts were at the fiercest in the world.

These writers endeavour to de/re construct that period of history, to probe into the power/knowledge interwoven in the imagination of what constitutes a nation, and further fill in the contextual gaps brought by the mentioned lacunas. This period of history forms the background setting of many literary works, and certain important events are retold from different perspectives. Writers continuously participate in this exercise of (re)“imagining” and “de/reconstructing” history to make sense of what happened in the past and what gives Malaysia its current faces. As such, unsolved problems and repressed historical memories are opened up for further exploration and discussion.

For these reasons, this dissertation eventually turns to juxtapose the Cold War and the imagining of the concept of nation in contemporary Malaysian literature, instead of just focusing on the “post-1969” literature. In doing so, I hope to tackle the intricate relationship between the Cold War and nation-building in Malaysia. However, the selected works in this dissertation are not the so-called “Cold War literature” written during the era, such as the science fiction or the spy stories produced under McCarthyism. Instead, I choose contemporary literature that revisit the history of different periods, responding to and revealing problems left unsolved by the nation-building project, problems implicated in

the global structure of Cold War and post-Cold War realities. These (post) Cold War literatures that were written after 1989—the definitive year that marks the “end” of the Cold War—are testimonies of how the Cold War history is being regarded and redefined in contemporary times through poetics. Also, they showcase how the manifold relations of power operating during the Cold War continue to affect contemporary times.

In the next section, I will elaborate on the methodological framework and theory that I employ in this dissertation, and the problematics that inform my arguments as I examine my subject matter.

II. Method and Problematics

The fundamental methodological framework of this dissertation is based on the tenets of comparative cultural and literary studies, with an emphasis on geopolitical intervention, that is, the global Cold War politics. Examining a handful of theories derived from Postcolonial studies, Sinophone studies, ethnic and gender studies and so on, this dissertation seeks to put together the multifaceted ideas of “nation and nationalism,” as embodied in the chosen works. Under the umbrella “nation”, in which a broad range of topics are co-articulated such as the Cold War, postcolonial discourse, modernity, ethnicity, culture, language, memory and identity, this dissertation compares the works of seven writers and one filmmaker: Sinophone writers Li Zishu (黎紫書), Chang Kuei-

hsing (張貴興), Ng Kim Chew (黃錦樹) and filmmaker Au Sow-yee (區秀詒), and Anglophone writers Preeta Samarasan, Beth Yahp, Tash Aw and Chuah Guat Eng.

By way of comparison, the articulations of nationhood, national identity and national consciousness will be seen through the theory that the Martinican thinker Edouard Glissant calls “the poetics of Relation”, and by using the comparative method that Sinophone theorist Shih Shu-mei calls a “comparison as Relation”. In the case of the former, Glissant defines Relation as a “totality in evolution, whose order is continually in flux and whose disorder one can imagine forever” (*Poetics* 133). It is also an act (a verb) that actively changes the elements that are connected to one another. In other words, Relation observes and describes the phenomenological process of the world, while at the same time participating in this movement. Furthermore, the poetics of Relation “remains forever conjectural and presupposes no ideological stability”, thus it cannot be reduced to selected “prime elements” (32). “Relation” allows us to see the world in totality as well as in diversity.

We struggle against our problems, without knowing that throughout the world they are widespread. There is no place that does not have its elsewhere. No place where this is not an essential dilemma. No place where it is not necessary to come as close as

possible to figuring out this dialectic of interdependencies....

(Glissant, *Poetics* 153)

For Glissant, “creolization” is an unceasing process, as he introduced the term to describe features of the Caribbean’s composite cultures, which have created a new discourse of hybridity. He thinks that it is important to observe its constantly changing movement, and to Relation it to the widespread problems of the world, rather than provide it with closed and definite descriptions.

Inspired by Glissant, Shih Shu-mei sees the significance of doing the work of Relation as an exercise in poetics, which is to place “Relation as method” — “to relate here and elsewhere and to explore the inexhaustible and unpredictable entanglements and confluence among cultures and histories” (Shih, “Comparison” 85). She adopts Glissant’ idea of Relation to compare the colonial experiences depicted in William Faulkner’s novel on the American South, and Chang Kuei-hsing’s novel on Borneo. She “Relations” the two by tracing a related but different plantation system organized around slavery, which she calls the “plantation arc”. Nevertheless, this is neither to simply compare and contrast the similarities, differences and incommensurabilities between entities, nor to celebrate a universal value. Rather, this is to understand relational poetics, and to arrive at interrelatedness and interconnectedness. Doing “comparison as

Relation" (Shih's term) is an attempt to discover relationalities in form and in content, and to understand them through poetics.

In so doing, I put together Malaysian literatures in two linguistic spheres, not only to create dialogues between them, but also to Relation the common problematics that the literary actors seek to answer in their works. These includes the dialectics of ethnicity and language, colonialism and nation-building, majority and minority, monolinguality and multilinguality, ancestrality and modernity, globality and locality—all of which contribute to the imaginings of nation, a collective value, but at the same time showcasing the diversified concerns that different parties invest in these categories. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Relation does not agree with cultural relativism which bears the risk of performing essentialism; it does not see each culture or each linguistic sphere as a bounded entity. Instead, it redefines commonalities and diversities by putting them in Relation:

At every moment Relation becomes complete but also is destroyed in its generality by exactly what we put into action in a particular time and place. Relation that is destroyed, at every instant and in every circumstance, by this particularity spelling our opacities, through this singularity, becomes once again the experience of

relation....Relation exists in being realized, that is, in being completed in a common place. (Glissant, *Poetics* 203)

Only when things are being put in a common ground for Relation, then can we discover the dialectic between them.

Furthermore, the “Relationing” process also allows us to see the changes in the world as relative and connected, such as the Third World national imaginings in the shadow of the Cold War. This dissertation sees Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian literature as entities that are thoroughly penetrated by the realities and effects of global Cold War politics as it pertains to Malaysia, and also as dynamic interventions into these arenas. Therefore, it seeks to investigate the narratives of the writers and filmmakers, of their ways of linking together the aesthetic *and* the political in their depictions of historical and contemporary Malaysia. Also, it foregrounds the intricate operations of power/knowledge in such Relations. To put it another way, the dissertation examines the subject matter—Relation—in each chapter. I will elaborate in the next part of this Introduction why the Cold War matters in this formulation of the poetics of Relation.

By exploring the poetics and politics operating in literary and filmic texts, this dissertation cross-references the phenomenological and psychological depictions of society and self. In order to “Relation” these different works, I have

set my point of departure as one that reads them as “minor literature”, following Deleuze and Guattari. I distinguish “minor literature” from the general notions of “minority literature” (with reference to “majority literature”) and “periphery” (with reference to “centre”). The latter – minority literature, periphery – are often considered as granted identity, but in the case of the former, the point of reference is a matter of choice.

Deleuze and Guattari define minor literature as one that “doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (16). They are referring to the works of Frantz Kafka, the Jewish writer who wrote in “Prague German”. Similarly, Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian literature can be seen as minor literature, though it does not necessarily mean that they are minority languages in Malaysia as compared to Malay. Rather, the writers’ languages are major languages (Chinese and English) which are widely used and recognized. Nevertheless, the writers selected for this thesis can be said to “deterritorialize” such languages, setting up as a “minor” practice—the Sinophone and the Anglophone. The features of a “minor” practice include the use of incomplete or withered vocabulary, incorrect syntax, and the deliberate use of exoticism, all of which helps to make up a writers’ own *patois*. And this minor language is what the writers use as a form of creation—a language of poetics.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature has three characteristics: first, it is a language of deterritorialization; second, everything in it is political; third, everything in it takes on a collective value. To take on a minoritarian approach is in fact to acknowledge a “becoming” identity, something that is not yet a norm or standard, to “know how to create a becoming-minor” (Deleuze and Guattari 27). To see the chosen texts as minor literature is also a way to foreground the complex structure of power/knowledge, and to acknowledge its functionality as a collective value.

...because collective or national consciousness is ‘often inactive in external life and always in the process of break-down,’ literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation. (17)

In other words, it is the poetics of Relation that allow writers to imagine the nation, to see themselves as a collective entity. It is also through the poetics articulated in minor literature that Relation can function, as the latter also rebels at the “comfortable trap of generalization” (Glissant, *Poetics* 156).

On a side note, the method not only allows two conceptual entities, say “modernity” and “communism” to interrelate, but also paves the way for a

larger picturing and understanding of Relationing. For example, one can Relation Anglophone Malaysian literature to Indian literature; Taiwanese literature to Okinawan literature and so on. The pivots that allow comparisons to happen might be: for the first pair of Anglophone Malaysian and Indian literature, the power/knowledge underlying the colonial estate; the second pair of Taiwanese and Okinawan literature, the marginality in nationhood. These comparisons can be done in Relation, by seeing the literature as minor literature.

For this dissertation, a “comparison as relation” method is chosen to bring together two minor literatures, one that seeks answers to the following problematics: first, in what ways are national imaginings shaped in Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian literature? How do we see them as self-defined, becoming, and collective identity? Second, how did global Cold War politics affect such national imaginings? Third, how do these minor literatures redefine dominant or hegemonic historical narratives, and create new patterns for narrating national identity?

In the subsequent parts of this Introduction, I will discuss three dimensions that constitutes the framework of this dissertation: the historical, the theoretical and the subject matter. The first deals with Cold War politics in Malay(si)a and the world. It positions Malaysia as an entity located at the Cold War “peripheries.” This positioning arguably helps to fill in a gap in global Cold War studies, and also acknowledges the effects of the Cold War in historical and

contemporary Malaysia. The second part questions the paradox of postcolonial studies and globalization discourse that function in a neo-liberal stance; it argues for a situated and inclusive approach to Malaysian literature. The third dimension explores the multilingual realities and literary history of Sinophone and Anglophone literature in Malaysia; it uses such contextualisations to examine the identity formation of the selected poetic writers.

III. (Post) Cold War Imaginaries

Redefining the Cold War from the peripheries

The “Cold War” usually refers to the contest of power between the two rival superpowers, the United States, and the former Soviet Union. It began roughly toward the end of Second World War and “ended” after the fall of Berlin Wall or the collapse of the Soviet Union. Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis famously claims that since “major war” was absent between 1945 and 1989, the “Cold War” should not be viewed as a cold war, but “as a rare and fondly remembered ‘Long Peace’”—the longest period of stability (Gaddis 216; 245). Political scientist Ronnie Lipschutz also echoes the point that the Cold War never caused “the loss of lives that would accompany a ‘hot’ one” and it was not a “shooting war, except in *peripheral* regions of the world” (Lipschutz 83;173; emphasis added). As can be seen, Cold War scholarship has remained Western centric for a long time. The fact is that whilst the Cold War was “cold” for the

capitalist-communist confrontation in the West, it was very “hot” in Asia, particularly in East and Southeast Asia, which also had to contend with anti-colonial and nationalist struggles. In other words, it is in these “peripheral” regions that armed conflicts were fierce, and their periphery prevented them from being taken into serious account in the collation of global Cold War history. In this regard, this dissertation therefore deliberately positions itself *at* the Cold War peripheries.

In order to shift away from the Western-centric historiography, Odd Arne Westad’s, in his important, *The Global Cold War*, has stressed that the US and Soviet political order to a very large extent shaped “political, social, and cultural changes in Third World countries” (Westad 3). More specifically, the leaders of the Third World countries chose “ideological allegiance” to one of the superpowers, and this “led them to subscribe to models of development that proved disastrous for their own peoples” (3). It was not until recent years that some scholars began to touch upon the aftermath of the Cold War from an Asian perspective³. Most of them deal with the situation in East Asia (comprising communist China and the two Koreas) and the “upper arc” of Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). Some have also touched to some extent on the “literary” or “cultural” Cold War⁴. As noted by Adam Pietty, literary studies

³ See Zheng Yangwen, Liu Hong and Michael Szonyi (eds) *Cold War in Asia*; Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat (eds) *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia*; Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter (eds) *Ruptured Histories*; Albert Lau (ed) *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*.

⁴ See Andrew Hammond (ed) *Cold War Literature and Global Cold War Literature*; Adam Pietty’s *The Literary Cold War*; Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem (eds) *Cultures at War*.

have been “bafflingly indifferent to the importance of the Cold War in shaping cultures in the postwar” (Pietty 5). Therefore, this dissertation sets out to study Cold War culture in the peripheries, arguing that the Cold War is not a history that has been neatly concluded but maintains a continual process that has been de/reconstructed in the “post-Cold War” era. In particular, creative works and criticisms work towards a de/reconstruction of Cold War ideology, as their authors work towards redefining Cold War culture through artistic interventions. Furthermore, I also argue that postcolonial scholarship and Cold War historiography have to be engaged with each other seriously as they are theoretically related. In such discourse, Glissant’s poetics of Relation can help tracing their intersections.

To “redefine” Cold War culture, I adopt a stance similar to the one that social anthropologist Heonik Kwon takes in *The Other Cold War*. He goes as far as to argue that “there has never been a conflict called *the cold war*” as a bipolarized human community “cannot be forced into a single coherent conceptual whole” (Kwon 6). He further proposes an approach towards the “decomposition of the cold war”, one that considers the end of the cold war as a “participatory, ethnographic question rather than as a historical issue” (8). More importantly, he underscores the importance of grasping “how the peripheral others experienced and recount the history of the cold war” and how the representation of their struggles are “critical to the understanding of the global cold war” (8). In other words, the Cold War encounters at the peripheries call

into question the Western-centric perspective of that part of history in the twentieth century. Furthermore, the human experiences characterized by political violence can redefine the Cold War through the use of certain critical interventions, such as from a literary and cultural angle. Thus, it is important to generate in-depth discussion of the global Cold War effects on peripheral regions and illustrate how the organic struggles experienced by the locals were in response to the global situation⁵.

As mentioned, it is important to note that the Cold War in Asia entailed revolutionary struggles for decolonization. Some scholars emphasise that the Cold War political struggles were entangled with other processes such as the “women’s liberation, revolution, nationalism, decolonization and postcolonial experience, new regional groupings and the deterritorialization of ethnic populations”, thus it is important to go beyond the bipolar competition and turn towards the “internal dynamics and trajectories” (Szonyi and Liu 7)⁶. For example, in Malaya, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) fought a twelve-year “insurgency” war with the Commonwealth troops from 1948 to 1960, and Singapore cultural theorist Chua Beng Huat calls it a “civil war” instead of a

⁵ In this dissertation, I will still use the capitalization of “Cold War” to refer to the historical period roughly between 1945 and 1990 when the communist and anti-communist movements were in contention.

⁶ Although in this volume of essays the editors set out calling for investigating the social and cultural phenomena of the Cold War and using comparative approaches to understand the Cold War in Asia, the volume ends up being overly China-centric in objectives, and far too little research on the cultural dimensions of the Cold War was accomplished.

“cold war” (Chua 232). This “lacuna” (1948-1960) was a crucial period, for Malaya underwent a transition from a colonial land to a postcolonial nation.

The exact number of deaths in the guerrilla warfare was impossible to estimate, yet it is undeniable that the history of the Cold War in Malaya was an exceptionally violent one. During this time, more than 500,000 peasants (around 10% of the Malayan population), predominantly Chinese, were removed from their land and forcibly resettled in “new villages” under the Briggs’ plan. It was a military plan to cut off rural Chinese support for the MCP, but in a way demarcating racial borders due to the villages’ homogenous nature. In this regard, we could refer to Heonik Kwon’s argument that the Cold War is in fact an ethnographic question rather than a historical issue. These Chinese “new villages” are still in existence in Malaysia, and they can be seen as symbolic legacies of the Cold War. In general, the Cold War impacted many families in Malaysia, and the memories of communism have played a significant part in fuelling artistic representations of national imaginings in Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian literature⁷.

This dissertation does not set out to revisit the political practices enacted in Malaysia during the Cold War, nor does it intend to examine literatures that were produced during the Cold War⁸. Instead, it focuses on (post) Cold War

⁷ See, for example, Alison M. Groppe’s *Sinophone Malaysian Literature*, Chapter 7, “Memories of Communism”.

⁸ However, it is worth an empirical analysis on the “behind-curtain” American or Soviet aids manifested in literary magazines or other knowledge production during the Cold War. For example, Malaysian critic Chong Fah Hing has suggested that at least two local Chinese

literatures that were written after 1989, endeavouring to look at the cultural effects that the Cold War had on individuals as depicted in contemporary artistic representation. Moreover, it attempts to understand the psyche and thoughts of individuals in the (post) Cold War era by studying the poetics of Relation. As stated earlier, this dissertation wants to redefine “Cold War literature” by supplementing the deficiencies of global Cold War historical accounts with an examination of artistic interventions, especially those from peripheral regions. It intends to unfold the effects of the Cold War on contemporary literature, so as to contribute to the “participatory” Cold War history. More importantly, highlighting the effects of the Cold War in contemporary discourse is instrumental in uncovering the (neo)colonial power/knowledge operating in our times. As Malaysian social anthropologist Shamsul A.B. puts it, “colonial knowledge” has shaped our history to a large extent, but only a few actually problematize and question “the construction of historical knowledge” (33). I argue that to reconsider the (post)colonial situation in Malaysia, it is important to examine the legacy left by the Cold War.

Among scholars who study (post) Cold War culture, Taiwanese scholar Chen Kuan-hsing appears to be one of the most energetic pioneers in contemporary Asia calling for an in-depth critical reflection on the movements

literary magazines in the 1960s, such as *Chao Foon* 《蕉風》 or *Chinese Student Weekly* 《中國學生週報》, were published by an American-aid Hong Kong publisher Union Books (友聯出版社) (Chong “Yuyan” 210).

of genuine “deimperialization”. In his monograph *Asia as Method*, which comments on Cold War politics in Asia, Chen discovers three interwoven fundamental problems that continue to impact Asia: first, colonialism, second, the global structure of the world during the Cold War and third, the imperialist imaginary (Chen x). These three forces are intimately linked and have become entangled in one historical process. For this reason, Chen calls for a genuine process of decolonization, deimperialization and de-Cold War simultaneously in the intelligentsia (xii). It is important to note that, Chen does not equate these three movements with a simplified version of anti-colonialism – that is, with the process of getting rid of colonizers and the building of nation-states. Instead, the process is an endeavour of the *colonized* to

reflectively work out a historical relation with the former colonizer, culturally, politically, and economically. This can be a painful process involving the practice of *self-critique, self-negation, and self-discovery*, but the desire to form a less coerced and more reflexive and dignified subjectivity necessitates it...It means to mark out a space in which unspoken stories and histories may be told, and to recognize and map the historically constituted cultural and political effects of the Cold War. (Chen 3; 120; emphasis added)

Chen Kuan-hsing recognizes that many former colonies of the Third World have yet to undergo a genuine deimperialization process, including his homeland Taiwan. The inextricable relationship between themselves and their colonizers have yet to be critically pondered over, even though it is now commonplace to call these countries “postcolonial” . Yet, the question is, how postcolonial are they? From another perspective, Chua Beng Huat echoes Chen’s critiques by arguing that the reason why colonial masters are seen as benign benefactors who brought modernity to Southeast Asia is because of the effect of the Cold War — the successful implantation of anti-communist propaganda in the region (Chua 232-33). He adds that, due to the fact that colonial regimes were part of the pre-independence armed conflicts in the “making of the new nations that emerged from colonialism”, the sentiment in the new nation “regarding colonialism as the oppressive history of colonization was displaced by the anticipation and fear of ‘totalitarian oppression’ of communism” (232). In other words, the critiques of colonialism and its aftermath have been shifted towards the demonization of the communists or leftist sympathizers. The latter’s anti-Imperialist efforts during colonial days and occupation period have been negated, as the Cold War has hijacked the critical period to reflect upon de/colonization. As Chua laments,

history loses its significance except as a measure of how far the society has come and how much it has left behind. History is to be selectively recalled only if it serves to drive the people forward, if

only to forget the underdeveloped, materially deprived “bad” old days. History is thus reinterpreted in light of the successful economic present. There is little time for critical examination of the past with the aim of recovering and resurrecting suppressed voices and sentiments during the colonial days. (Chua 234)

(Post) colonial negotiation of power: The origins of Malay Hegemony

To uncover the historical undercurrents in the Cold War period, one important route is to uncover the formulation of Malay hegemony. As mentioned in Part I, two historical “lacunas” during the Cold War have navigated us to confront only the “ethnic paradigm” without probing into deeper structural problems. Looking back into history, the idea of Malay sovereignty and the institutionalization of Malay hegemony were put forward by the right-wing UMNO which was founded in 1946—two years before the first lacuna was formed. In fact, Malay nationalist movement during the colonial period underwent a radical change after UMNO took the centre stage (Budiawan 89).

Earlier Malay nationalist groups formed in 1930s and 1940s, such as the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Union of Malay Youth, KMM), Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (Malay Nationalist Party, PKMM) and so on, were mostly inspired by the leftist nationalist movement in Indonesia. They were active in launching anti-colonial movements, imagining a “nation” that is free of

oppression and foreign power. Yet, since UMNO's dominance in the Malay nationalist movement,

the issue of "nationhood" which by then meant promoting the rights and privileges of the Malays in coexistence with the non-Malays, was more dominant, rather than the issue of "kerakyatan" (peoplehood) in the sense of class perspective, free of ethno-nationalism, as promoted by the Malay (and non-Malay) leftist nationalists.

(Budiawan 89)

How did UMNO, the incumbent ruling party, gain its power and became the "representative" of the Malay *and* the nation until today? How did left-wing Malay nationalists lose their legitimacy in imagining a new nation of Malay(si)a? The lacuna of 1948 was crucial for this change, and the lacuna of 1969 allowed UMNO to reconsolidate its power.

To understand this serial of change in national imaginings, Malaysian development sociologist Abdul Rahman Embong has revisited the part of history. He has showcased the intense debate between the ruling elites and the populace who had different visions for the new state and related citizenship qualifications in the 1940s (Abdul Rahman 14-16). In general, he shows the power struggles and ideological conflicts that were present before the formation of the

new nation-state of Malaya, unveiling the national imagination that was shaped from a “bottom-up” prospective, or more precisely, from the Left.

Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the ignominious British colonizers came back to “reclaim” its colony. They proposed the concept of the Malayan Union in 1946, and thereby federated the Malay states and the Straits Settlements to be ruled directly under the British Crown. This proposal was a failure because of the opposition of the Malays, as it reduced the Sultans’ power and granted citizenship to non-Malay immigrants. Yet more importantly, it gave birth to the right-wing nationalistic party UMNO, which won the General Elections in 1955 and has been in power to date. UMNO and the British joined hands in 1946 and came up with the “Federal of Malaya Constitutional Proposal”, which emphasized a monolithic agenda on religion, language and culture.

At the same time, the left-wing coalition PUTERA-AMCJA (*Pusat Tenaga Rakyat* [Center of People’s Power] and All-Malaya Council of Joint Action) formulated the “People’s Constitutional Proposal”, which emphasized equality and plurality as an alternative to the UMNO-British proposal. The mass-supported PUTERA-AMCJA⁹ even staged a successful nationwide *Hartal* (strike) to protest against the Revised Constitutional Proposal. However, as we now know in hindsight, on one hand the British and UMNO came into agreement in

⁹ Abdul Rahman Embong argues that PUTERA-AMCJA had “a mass strength of about 600,000, a large number in a small population of about 4.9 million then”.

1948 to implement their constitutional proposal in the new nation, while, on the other hand, declaring the country to be in a state of Emergency to wipe out the Leftists and other anti-colonial forces. Many members of the PUTERA-AMCJA joined the guerrilla struggle, which was led by the Malayan Communist Party, and walked into the jungle. On 31 August 1957, the power was “transferred” by the British to UMNO leader Tunku Abdul Rahman, who shouted Independence of Malaya on that day. Ironically, the transfer of power happened during the “Emergency” period that only ended three years later. As can be seen, this is the lacuna in the state of exception that Agamben refers to. Paradoxically the independence of Malaya was “negotiated” in this state of exception when the authority applied “a force of law without law” (Agamben 39). Since then, UMNO has dominated the discourse of Malay identity, and UMNO’s right-wing version of national imagination has overshadowed the legitimacy of other alternative nationalist ideas. This watershed has defined future politics, and the formation of the second lacuna on May 13, 1969 was merely a reinforcement of such dominated discourse. It was done after UMNO lost its majority seats to non-Malay political parties.

In the “founding father”’s speech on the day of *Merdeka* (Independence), given that the British had been perceived as benign benefactors and as the country’s “best friend”, it is of no doubt that the independence of Malaya has never been about an act of decolonization:

We shall therefore always remember with gratitude the assistance which we have received from Great Britain down our long path to nationhood; an assistance which culminated today with the proclamation of Malaya's Independence. But the long standing friendship between our countries does not cease with independence: rather it takes on a new form....Thus today a new chapter opens in our relationship with Britain; our colonial status has given place to full equality but we are confident that, fortified by old associations, and linked by old memories, our ties with Britain will grow ever stronger and more durable. British will ever find in us her best friend, and it is a source of much gratification to my Government that British Civil Servants will continue to serve in this country to assist us in the solution of the many problems which independence will present. (Tunku Abdul Rahman, "Proclamation" n.p.)

Due to the unreflexive decolonization project undertaken since 1957, a "neo-colonial" desire was soon generated in 1963. The (ex)colonizer proposed that the establishment of the Federation of "Malaysia" should be taken as the "ultimate aim of British policy" (Ooi K.G. 116). It was an attempt to mark out nation-states boundaries in the British territories in Southeast Asia, which included Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah). Singapore left the country after a brief two-

year marriage following two racial riots that erupted in 1964. In the eyes of the Left-oriented Sukarno, the then President of Indonesia, the “Malaysia” agenda was a neo-colonial, anti-communist conspiracy aimed at blocking up the Soviet-Union-supported Indonesia. Guerrilla struggles in Sarawak and North Borneo received assistance from Indonesia to fight against the British and state authority but to no avail. Sinophone writer Chang Kuei-hsing sets his novel *Elephants* in this period when the Sarawak guerrillas fought against the proposal of “Malaysia” in the Borneo jungle. During this jungle war period, Sukarno staged a four-year *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) between Malaysia and Indonesia which damaged the relationship between two “brothers” who share common cultural roots (*serumpun* [cognate]). Anglophone novelist Tash Aw supplies us with this part of historical imaginaries through the eyes of his Indonesia protagonists.

Broadly speaking, by grasping the ideas that underpin crucial political and ideological contests conducted during this period, we can get a better idea of what shapes today’s Malaysia. In brief, the historical lacuna in 1948 has shown how British colonizers and UMNO joined hands in the creation of the new nation, and thus ensuring that a genuine decolonization has never existed in Malaysia. In this regard, the critiques of Malaysian sociologist-thinker Syed Hussein Alatas are the most straightforward and powerful.

The Malay ruling party inherited the rule from the British without a struggle for independence such as that which took place in

Indonesia, India and the Philippines. As such there was also no ideological struggle. There was no intellectual break with British ideological thinking at the deeper layer of thought. The leadership of this party were recruited from the top hierarchy of the civil service trained by the British, and middle class Malay school teachers and civil servants. The few professionals associated with it did not set the pattern. (Syed Hussein 152)

Syed Hussein and Abdul Rahman's arguments showcase how elitist accounts have dominated Malaysian history without deep reflection on (de)colonialization. The alternative side of History, or the history of the people, has been covered up by the ruling class, who takes the opportunity of the Cold War to silence alternative voices from the people. The dissipated force of the Left in Malaysian history resonates with the arguments of Chen Kuan-hsing and Chua Beng Huat that the Cold War resulted in the failure of a genuine decolonization process in the nation. In other words, the Cold War has hijacked the key period for critical reflection on colonialism in Malay(sia). By demonizing the Leftists, the state apparatus had joined hands with the colonial power in the making of a new nation. Such a phenomenon has naturally hindered the discussion on the Cold War and on colonialism, and this is why the writers and filmmakers continue to see this "silencing" as their creative inspiration. They

reimagine the nation in their own way, challenging the discourse dominated by the right-wing state apparatus.

The tense structure of global Cold War started to loosen up in the late 1980s. The contested powers, such as Mainland China and Taiwan, as well as the two Koreas, started to allow family reunions and restricted interactions in trade, travel and education. This brought forth the possibility of “reconciliation” and for transitional justice to happen. Chen Kuan-hsing affectingly describes the emotional scenes of family reunions in Seoul, in which he experienced “Modernity and its tears” (Chen 115-24). Unfortunately, reconciliation has never been realized in Malaysia. An obvious example is Chin Peng, the last Secretary-General of the MCP, who was denied (re)entry into Malaysia after his forces were defeated. Chin died in Bangkok on 16th September 2013 (which ironically marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Malaysia), but even his ashes were not allowed to be taken back to his homeland (Zolkepli n.p.). In addition, in the cultural sphere, director Amir Muhammad’s two films about communists—*The Last Communist* (2006) and *Village People Radio Show* (2007)—were banned by authorities. In a more recent case, the film *New Villages* (2013), which deals with the forced settlement during the Emergency, was suspended from public screening for the reason that it “glorifies communism” (Boo n.p.). In a recent case, a workshop on Marxism organized by Socialist Party of Malaysia was banned by the police for the same reason (Malaysiakini n.p.).

Whether it is discussing the history of the Left or the truth about the May 13 incident, the space for public release and discussion is still subjected to the authoritative power of the Malay state capitalist class. As a result, there is an urgent need to excavate and reopen historical memories repressed by the Cold War through an examination of various historical narratives. This means that we need to explore the thoughts of individuals sandwiched between the ideologies of “left” and “right” during this period. As a researcher on literary functions, I intend to draw upon Glissant’s idea of “poetics of Relation”, which focuses on both aesthetic *and* political mentalities, to showcase the power-relation network in literature shaped by the Cold War. It is only through the poetics—the “highest point of knowledge” as Glissant suggests—that we can have a rhizomic view of the cultural politics in Malaysia. In order to break through the hauntology or “haunting” exerted by the Cold War, Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian writers arguably revisit important historical sites and tackle unsolved problems through their fictionalized accounts. They supply us with the cultural dynamics of the Cold War by investigating individual—“flesh and blood” (*xierou* 血肉) lives. To put it simply, I intend to look *across* different power struggles to explore lateral relational networks in literature. By so doing, I propose a nation-state-based reading of Malaysian literature, which is to set the nation-state as the point of departure and reference and to call into question the prevalent notion of a “transnational” or “postnational” turn in literature.

IV. Reimagining Nation, Nationalism and Minor Transnationalism

Whose imagined communities?

Although this research project focuses on the Malaysian nation-state, it does not set out to applaud nationalism from political or economic perspectives. Instead, it seeks to problematize the condemnation of nationalism in scholarship, to shine a light on unsettled issues left behind by such condemnation, and to address national consciousness depicted in artistic scenes. It recognizes the problematic colonial formation of nationalism in many Third World developing countries, yet it suggests that nation is a continually contested space that is worth pondering upon scholarly. The question of “nation” has never been completely settled in the context of Malaysia, due to the ramifications of the Cold War. Without recognizing in advance the significance of nationalism and national consciousness formed in 1940s to 1960s Malay(si)a, it will be insufficient, if not lopsided, to call for a “transnational turn” literary studies¹⁰.

My approach to rethink nation and nationalism adopts Partha Chatterjee’s argument in *The Nation and Its Fragments*, for he provides insights into challenging Benedict Anderson’s notion of nationalism established in his influential *Imagined Communities*. Chatterjee highlights the “spiritual” domain of nationalism instead of Anderson’s “material” culture of nationalism that is

¹⁰ There are many academic works that address the “transnational turn” in literature, for example Paul Jay’s *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Gursel and Emin-Tunc (eds) *The Transnational Turn in American Studies* to name a few.

realized in print capitalism. He condemns a set of Western “modular forms” that defines the historical experience of nationalism that overlooks “anticolonial nationalism” in the colonized states. As he puts it,

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain “modular” forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized. (Chatterjee 5)

In other words, he calls into question the logic of decolonization that has been set by colonial legacy. The postcolonial scholars see nationalism of the colonized as an act of emulating the West (in making of a nation-state), instead of seeing it as an authentic act of resistance that abandons the European heritage of modernity. Bearing Chatterjee’s argument in mind, I propose revisiting the concept of nation and nationalism in Malaysia during the two historical lacunas, namely 1948 and 1969. In my opinion, the anticolonial, national consciousness in

the lacunas have yet to be taken into serious account, since postcolonial scholars have already opted for a “diasporic”, “transnational” or “postnational” approach to examining Malaysian literature. In this way, I argue, the process of decolonization has never been fully explored.

The transnational, postnational, and the neo-liberal

Following the neo-liberalist trend which started out in the 70s and 80s, it is fashionable in postcolonial discourse to talk about globalization in literary studies and to claim that the world has moved to a “postnational” stage. Migrancy, diaspora, flexible citizenships and multiculturalism have become the often articulated terms when critics theorize about the postcolonial situation in the Third World. James Clifford in his influential essay “Diasporas” brings up a changing notion of the term, in which he opposes the overall inclination that diaspora is all about negative displacement, a lamentation of lost homelands, or an “ideal-type” of vision to migrate to the metropolitan center, but a consciousness that “makes the best of a bad situation” (Clifford 312). Diasporic consciousness, in his sense, is replacing the common notion of minority studies, and provides a solution to the problematic exclusions of the nation-state including the place of “tribal”/indigenous people (312-3). Andrew Smith, for another instance, points out that migration has become a new way of being:

We live in a world in which there are no longer set centres, definite horizons, or clear limits on things...migrancy becomes the name for the condition of human beings as such, a name for how we exist and understand ourselves in the twenty-first century. (Smith 247)

In other words, nation borders have been seen as unreliable dimensions and criteria to establish an individual's identity. This is why the possession of citizenships and passports do not automatically result in a person's patriotism or an affiliation with a single nation-state. Cultural anthropologist Aihwa Ong famously offers a broad term "flexible citizenship" to situate the people who are "always in transit...split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets" (Ong 2). Ong suggests a new identity permutation that has "implications for our understanding of the late modern subject" (3). A Chinese Malaysian based in the United States herself, Ong's idea also reveals the global tendency towards flexibility, mobility, fluidity in relation to diasporic subjects, for example, the "multiply displaced" overseas Chinese (2). From the statements above, it is not difficult to understand that a mobile diasporic identity has been celebrated for its porous, inclusive spaces compared to what nation-states can offer.

Apart from the above, Arjun Appadurai proposes the idea of a "postnational" identity, as a means of attacking the problematic form of nation-states. He defines the term "postnational" as a "temporal and historical...process

of moving to a global order in which the nation-state has become *obsolete...*" (169; emphasis added):

In these postnational spaces, the incapacity of the nation-state to tolerate diversity (as it seeks the homogeneity of its citizens, the simultaneity of its presence, the consensuality of its narrative, and the stability of its citizens) may, perhaps, be overcome. (Appadurai 177)

For him, in the contemporary postnational world, pluralism and diasporic diversity can be manifested when people move across and beyond national borders and structures. And the United States of America should face up to the question of global diasporas and "confront the needs of pluralism and of immigration" (173).

As a matter of fact, Postcolonialism, with the help of globalization, has favoured a timeless and placeless condition of being. Diaspora no longer laments displacement and placelessness, but is being celebrated for its fluidity, mobility, flexibility and transnationality. In contrast, the nation-state is seen as an obsolete entity. This paradigm seems to argue that the diasporic and migrant subjects perceive crossing the nation-state border as the only solution to subverting the hegemonic power of nationalism. By laying emphasis on the stepping out of nation-states, postcolonial critics tend to favour immigrant authors while

endorsing the “multicultural” elements in their works. In other words, the diasporic subject enters the globalized world, enjoying the privilege of speaking as the “spokesman of his tribe” to a wider audience (Ha Jin’s term); while the writers who stay back in the country (and who do not write in English-language) remain underrepresented. This is clearly demonstrated by how Western-centric postcolonial studies are, and by the commoditization of postcolonial literature marketed to Western audiences who yearn for “exotic” experiences.

As a result, it is not surprising to discover that within the field of Postcolonial literary studies, texts from the diasporic writers who write in English (especially postcolonial writers who migrated to the West) are far more discussed than local writers. In response to this prevalent situation, Indian poet and critic Makarand Paranjape criticizes the idea of diaspora for it “has become the substitute essence for the idea of the homeland” (Paranjape 226). He further asserts radically that the Indian intellectuals in the West who think of themselves presenting Indian cultures to worldwide audiences are “akin to that of African middlemen who sold slaves to the white traders” (239). Although Paranjape seems to be extremist, his criticisms that the diasporic Anglophone writers have received far more attention than home-based have to be seriously noted. He proposes that a sense of belonging (or refusal to belong) should be taken into serious consideration, instead of privileging the sense of dispossession and displacement (226; 241-2).

In another part of the Third World, Malaysian critic Chong Fah Hing (莊華興) makes a similar claim that writers and critics should actively participate in the construction (and contestation) of building a “national literature”, not merely lament a “lost” national identity framework or promote an identity of having “nationless literature” (a term borrowed from the Sinophone writer Ng Kim Chew) because this ignores the impact of socio-political events on literature (Chong “Nationalism” 69-86; Chong “Guojia wenxue” 8-30). For him, the transnational status of literature is only a camouflaged and spurious posture, and the “return of the inner soul” to the homeland should be the main concern (所謂文學的跨國流動/流寓論純粹是一種偽裝姿態，內在精神的復返才是真靈魂¹¹) (“Guajia wenxue” 13.) In other words, the idea of transnationalism, postnationalism, diaspora or flexible citizenships should not take centre stage. Rather, the communication and response of literature towards “nation” or “home” should be the main focus. This idea also works in tandem with what Sinophone critic, Shih Shu-mei, proposed in her influential essay “Against Diaspora”, which I will further examine in the next part of this chapter.

Multiculturalism in the “postcolonial exotic”

From another perspective, scholars like Graham Huggan and Slavoj Žižek have argued against unreflexive multiculturalism and exotic commodification in

¹¹ All English translations of the Chinese excerpts in the entire thesis are mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

postcolonial literature. They trenchantly examine how fetishization of cultural differences in postcolonial studies may work complicitly with the logic of global capitalism. Žižek attacks critics who remain silent towards capitalism as their “critical energy [has] found a substitute outlet in fighting for cultural difference, which leave[s] the basic homogeneity of the capitalist world-system intact” (Žižek 46). He further asserts that “multiculturalism” is in fact the “ideal form of ideology in this global capitalism”, which signifies “a kind of empty global position”, and continues to “[treat] *each* local culture the way the colonizer treats colonized people” (44; emphasis original). In other words, such logic of multiculturalism works exactly as a form of colonization. Huggan, on the other hand, sharply points out that the current global situation of “postcoloniality” has in fact worked towards the opposite direction of the primary objectives of postcolonial writing, one that originally showcases social inequalities under colonialism and local agencies’ resistance that seeks emancipation (Huggan ix). He further criticizes the institutionalization and the “value” of marginality in the Western academy, which imposes a consciousness of exoticism that “effectively hides the power relations behind... [the essentialist labelling of marginalized racial/ethnic groups], allowing the dominant culture to attribute value to the margins while continuing to define them in its own self-privileging terms.” (24)

This criticism has further problematized the “major versus minor” power-relation network by highlighting that “minority studies” is institutionalized in the logic of “the West and the Rest”. Such logic not only sees the grouping of

minorities as a monolithic whole in contention with the West, but also elides the structural sociocultural problems that the (postcolonial) minority subject faces, such as capitalism and nationalism. Minority literatures, in this sense, are generalized and compiled into one entity, where they work together collectively “with” the oppositional centre/major pole and where their own hybridity and complexity cannot be recognised. In this regard, it is important to read the literature as “minor literature”, following Deleuze and Guattari, as I have suggested in Part II.

To sum up the general criticism on nationalism and transnationalism in the postcolonial literary sphere, we can sort out the following phenomenon: firstly, the overemphasis on the diasporic situation, which neglects the subjects’ sense of belonging to home; second, the undue favour toward immigrant authors who migrated to the West and write in English and the ignoring of local authors who write in languages other than English; thirdly, the shallow embrace of cultural difference or multiculturalism not only colludes with global capitalism, but also de-emphasizes the political-economic discussion of literature. Such criticism fails to delineate structural problems in its respective region, for example, the effects of the Cold War and the unsettled colonial legacies in Malaysia.

In the case of my chosen writers for this project, Anglophone writers who stay in the United States or the United Kingdom, such as Tash Aw and Preeta Samarasan, have won international acclaim for their works; Beth Yahp, who

migrated to Australia, has received less attention, while the home-based (and self-published) Chuah Guat Eng is far less known to the world even though her novels are remarkable. For Sinophone writers, it is not surprising that their works are circulated only within a Chinese-language sphere. However, owing to the rise of Sinophone studies in recent years, these texts have been noticed by some important theorists based in the United States, such as Shih Shu-mei and David Wang Der-wei, and Sinophone Malaysian literature has also started to receive attention from the Western academy. However, it is noteworthy that Taiwan has become an instrumental base and medium for Sinophone Malaysian writers to seek opportunities in gathering cultural capital. Whether it is by migrating to Taiwan, such as in the case of Chang Kuei-hsing and Ng Kim Chew, or by being published and recognized in Taiwan, such as Li Zishu and Au Sow-yee, Sinophone Malaysian authors face many challenges as the cultural capital at home remains scarce.

Rethinking nation in minor literature

In this project, I wish to turn to look at national consciousness of the selected writers, be they diasporic or home-based. Instead of arguing for a flexible citizenship, I wish to underline that Malaysian literature, whether in the framework of globalization or localization, still addresses nationalism consciously. In other words, the nation, or to be precise, Malaysia, is the space onto which they project their artistic imaginaries. Furthermore, these imaginings

are shaped by their narratives on the Cold War culture. From British Malaya to Malaya, then to Malaysia, the writers arguably challenge the tendency to regard the concept of “nation” as a bounded and absolute entity in which the individuals who live within it are seen as a collective whole. Instead, they deconstruct the making of a nation by arguing for the hybridity within the nation itself, as well as within a region. In this dissertation, I look for the poetics of Relation in their works that elucidate their national consciousness.

In this way, this point of departure further problematizes the concept of “minority studies” in postcolonial literature. In general, Sinophone and Anglophone speakers in Malaysia, as well as the ethnic Chinese and Indians, see themselves as a member of minority groups as they have had to confront the norm of Malay supremacy in post-1969 Malaysia. It seems that there is a clear centre-and-periphery binary that needs to be overcome, as the minority resistance continually clashes with the majority centre. Nevertheless, I find this logic rather simplistic, if not essentialist. Critics of Malay hegemony usually speak on behalf of linguistic and ethnic minorities while, at the same time, likening them to a homogeneous sociocultural entity. This paradigm should be called into question as minority literature itself is already hybrid and it not only acts as an intervention against the dominant narratives of the centre, but also builds relationships with other minority cultures. In addition to this, we also have to ask: who exactly are the minorities?

In my opinion, when criticizing Malay supremacy, some are arguably emboldened (un)consciously by the fact that Chinese and English are more international compared to Malay. The former turns to the Sinophone world, which comprises Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau etcetera, and the latter faces the global world without hindrance. Malay is only useful within the region. Moreover, critics who applaud the discourse of diaspora or flexible citizenship tend to emphasize the movement of people who cross national borders; yet, in the current “globalized” world, can those who have the capability of moving or traveling beyond their home countries be categorized confidently as “minorities”? Borrowing Paranjape’s words, “what about those who stayed back home?”, or those who do not have capital to leave? As I have mentioned above, postcolonial discourse has emancipatory roots in local resistance struggles against colonial hegemonic power/knowledge. The prevalent postcolonial discourse that celebrates diasporic identity and cultural minorities, arguably ignores the sufferings of the real oppressed, while confidently presenting its chosen groups as victims. This ventures on elitism, and potentially overlooks the real struggles of people.

Japanese-American literary scholar, Masao Miyoshi, has cogently pointed out the drawbacks of this neo-liberalist logic of cultural difference in contemporary times. For him, the “cultural turn” in postcolonial studies has distanced itself from the political-economic dimension and this has de-emphasized the real suffering of the oppressed (Miyoshi 287). He insists that the

logic of “difference” paradoxically poses several internal difficulties; among them, the silence of class struggles is the most serious problem. According to him, unlike ethnicity and gender, class is seldom mentioned in the logic of difference, and “the ruling class welcomes this silence” (294). As a matter of fact, in the three main concerns of progressive cultural critique (race, gender, and class), the former two would fight for the recognition of their identity, while the latter would aspire to erase its identity. This distinction shows that the logic of cultural difference and transnationalism has no intention to deal with the social class “minorities” or the working poor. Critics fighting for minority rights (race and gender) sometimes present their subjects as victims without noticing the real oppressed “minorities”. For this reason, again we can discover the significance of the Cold War in contemporary times, for the voices of Leftist groups, either in the literary circles or in politics, remain unheard. In this regard, the discussions of cultural difference and minority rights dominate the literary discourse at the expense of the silencing of class struggles *within* and *across* national boundaries. In response to this void, Anglophone writer Chuah Guat Eng and Preeta Samarasan have reflected on the unequal distribution issue in Malaysia, one that is arguably disguised by racial politics, or the “ethnic paradigm” that I mentioned above.

In order to seek an alternative route to address the interstices between the national and the transnational, as well as between the minor and the major, Lionnet and Shih offer a term “minor transnationalism” to focalize the

“transversal movements of culture” that occur in local *and* global spaces. They also adopt Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “minor literature” in forming the argument. In this regard, not only is the productive relationship of minor-versus-major taken note of here, the minor-to-minor networks are also considered.

Minor transnationality points toward and makes visible the multiple relations between the national and the transnational...[The] subjects are inevitably invested in their respective geopolitical spaces, often waiting to be recognized as “citizens” to receive the attendant privileges of full citizenship...Within the new formation of global multiculturalism, what constitutes the “minor” or “minority” needs to be reframed from the erstwhile nation-state-based model of understanding...*Nation-states are alive* as mechanisms of control and domination even when transnational corporations are supposed to have dissolved their boundaries. (Lionnet and Shih 8-10; italics added)

Lionnet and Shih set out to read literature through a “lateral” network, instead of a hierarchical one. Transnationalism, in their definition, does not work merely as a minor to major binary (such as the cases of postcolonial writers who move from the Third World to the metropolitan centre in the West). Instead, it also

involves many minor-to-minor networks (such as those who migrated to other Third-World countries, or those who never left). As Judith Butler puts it, “the point is not to stay marginal, but to participate in whatever network or marginal zones is spawned from other disciplinary centers and that, together, constitute a multiple displacement of those authorities” (Butler xxxiv). In other words, minority literature should be taken into account not only when they clash in the majority centre, but also when they exist among the minorities. And by engaging with other marginal networks, the minority groups can together redefine and “displace” authority.

In this regard, I argue that the nation-state remains a lively space for different ideologies to contend and negotiate. The writers who have crossed the nation-state boundary transnationally, and won international acclaim for their writing, do not have privilege over those who “stayed back home”. Instead, their transnationality offers them a perspective from which they can examine their identity and relationship with the nation that they have left, and it also engages with the cultural critique of the place that they are now based in. As a whole, minor transnationalism reveals the “creolization” of cultures (Glissant’s term), which “foregrounds the formative experiences of minorities *within and beyond* nation-states” (Lionnet and Shih 9; emphasis added). It seeks to place minority literature in a situated and concrete conception, so that minority subjects are able to attain *full citizenship* to participate in the national narrative, as well as to question the agenda of monolingual “national literature”. In this sphere, the

citizenship of the writers is no longer seen as something to be taken for granted, but one that they are able to obtain themselves via artistic actions. And when critics see the writers' works as minor literature, they are also paving the way to confirming the latter's citizenship to a culture.

Literary citizenship as power

I do not define citizenship in terms of the political form of existence—that is, pertaining to one's nationality. Instead, it is the idea of "literary citizenship" that I wish to pursue from here. This idea involves writers' initiatives to participate in civil society through their literary actions, and be given equal status. It can also be considered a permutation of "cultural citizenship", yet it goes beyond the latter's overemphasis on "cultural difference". By examining the relationship between the literary writers and civil society, I also do not imagine these writers as active participants of Malaysian socio-politics. Instead, I argue that the politics of literary actions, namely the act of writing, are two-pronged. On the one hand, it is a direct medium for these writers to play a part in civil society; on the other they can use this platform to view social realities from a distance.

Before establishing my definition on literary citizenship, let me cite from the Malaysian scholar Ngoi Guat Peng, who first proposed the term in 2010. She calls into question the continuous polemics of the Sinophone Malaysian literary circle in terms of the way nationality and locality are discussed. Furthermore, she

emphasizes the “publicness” and “civility” of literature, which embraces inclusivity and understanding.

文學公民身份的確立，是經由文學公共空間而確立的，因為「文學公民」是一個文學公共身份的認定。在這個公共空間，人們因為對文學的聯繫與承諾而凝聚認同感，並享有一定的公共權利，針對與文學相關的種種問題提出意見與看法。其「公民性」的彰顯，在於他可以履行文學公共義務的實踐，即文學的創作自由、作家的創作權。「創作」這個行為可以是個人的、私密的，但作品需要面對大眾，它有一定的公眾讀者或賴以對話的群體。所以文學公民身份在超越國家、個人、語言之餘，它其實是一個通往文學公民社會的途徑。(魏月萍“我不在家國” n.p.)

The establishment of literary citizenship is made possible through a literary public sphere, as literary citizenship is a verification of literary public identity. Within this public sphere, people gather in a sense of recognition because of their connections and commitments towards literature. They enjoy certain public rights, such as raising opinions and comments about the problems within literary circles. The realization of the “civility” lies in their fulfilment of literary public obligations, namely their creative freedom in literature and the writers’ rights to create. The

behaviour of “creation” may be personal and private, but the creative works have to face the public; they have certain public readers or communities with whom they would have dialogues. Literary citizenship, therefore, not only is an identity that surpasses nation, individual and language, but also is a pathway to a literary civil society. (Ngoi “I am not at home” n.p.)

In building the theory of “literary citizenship”, Ngoi is seeking a common public discourse in literature, which supports pluralism and coexistence (Ngoi “In search for publicness”). She intends to elevate the discussion of literature from the private sphere to the public, which also tends to emphasize the political identity of literature. It is noteworthy that, the political identity of literature is different from the identity of one’s nationality. Unlike nationality, literary citizenship that Ngoi proposes precisely sets out to break the boundary of nation-states and places. It is not inherited or granted by the authority, but rather it takes initiative in establishing connections in a literary public sphere and civil society. Ngoi’s endeavour to link the literary and the civil society is ground breaking, as she seeks to dismantle the discourse of state-granted citizenship and to create a public sphere where different literatures can communicate and interact. In post-1969 Malaysia, the field of literature has been dissected into various parts by means of ethnicity, language, religion and nationality. Ngoi’s theory allows these different voices the agency to choose where to belong, while confirming the

existence of a public sphere that traverses national borders and national language.

Although the literary citizenship that Ngoi proposes works towards an inclusive and communicative “public sphere” of literature, the location of this public sphere remains obscure. Moreover, the differentiation between a “literary civil society” and a political one, and whether the former stands for the aforementioned public sphere, remains unclear. As a matter of fact, Ngoi’s literary citizenship arguably takes a neo-liberalist stance, which is to leave behind the problematic nation-state and proceed to affirm a mobile identity. Disagreeing with the concept of flexible citizenship, and also to further locate the literary *within* civil society, I propose that literary citizenship be realized within a nation-state methodology. This concurs with what Lionnet and Shih proposed as minor transnationalism. The concept of a nation-state is alive as a point of departure, and as a point of reference. Yet it does not limit the national consciousness of the writers to only their political citizenship.

Literary citizenship argues for the political identity of literary actors, namely the roles of the writers and critics. It emphasizes the importance of the participation of literature in the nation-state’s civil society, so as not to reduce the struggles of these literary actors to merely “cultural issues”. However, this is neither to promote a historico-political distant reading of literature by linking it directly to political thoughts or social phenomena, nor does it suggest the use of new-criticism as a means of close reading texts. Instead, it highlights the

mapping of this “Relation” in the chaotic network in which the self and the collective interact and creolize, as Glissant suggests. Within civil society, literary actors live symbiotically with other subjects. On one hand, they continue to express interests and values of the members in their literary groups, and bring forward problematic issues that have been overlooked, such as the aftermath of the Cold War, religious violence, class struggles, racial conflicts etcetera. On the other hand, they connect themselves with subjects *within and beyond* the nation-state. For example, Anglophone writer Tash Aw writes about the historical connectivity of Malaysia with its Indonesian counterparts, in order to map out the symbiotic relationship in the region. Sinophone writer Chang Kuei-hsing tackles the issues occurring in British Borneo when it was not yet a part of Malaysia, and his migration to Taiwan does not stop him from reflecting on the relationship with his motherland Borneo, his “ancestral” land China, and on the legacies of Japanese Imperialism and British colonialism. In other words, these literary actors base themselves in Malaysia but link themselves in a state of relation and reconciliation. And this serves as the basic principle of literary citizenship.

Within this public sphere, literary actors interfere with civil society by means of writing and the filmmakers by means of images. As Glissant asks: “What might writing mean today? It is not just writing stories/histories to amuse or move people; it may be, above all, a matter for the frail but trustworthy link between the wild diversity of the world and the balance and knowledge we

desire to have" (Glissant "The Unforeseeable" 295). In other words, these works touch on the systems of power/knowledge and delineate the psyche networks of individuals at the same time. It concretises the subtle sentiments that aggregate a total "structure of feeling" of the collective self, interrogating the "I" as a self-conscious subject in the relational network of life and the world. This is the cogent potentiality that literature and the arts can have in civil society. In the form of fictionalization and artistic intervention, literature and the arts mediate the aesthetic and the political, literariness and worldliness.

To sum up, I suggest locating literature in a nation-state-based model of understanding, one that is shaped by the aggregate of the relational network in civil society and the constellation of its outward-directed, regional network. This public sphere encourages writers to participate actively in national imaginaries instead of immersing themselves in accounts of victimhood. "Passivity plays no part in Relation", as Glissant reminds us (*Poetics* 137). Whether in a sense of belonging or the refusal to belong, these writers express their national consciousness through literary works. They project their imaginaries onto the nation-states that they are related to—be it the original homelands or the places that they are now based at. At the same time, they seek to connect the histories within and beyond the nation. Writers who move beyond the national boundaries, or those who have stayed back home, have worked collectively towards building a literary citizenship that allows them to participate in the national discourse. Instead of emphasizing a fluid and mobile transnational

identity, this dissertation turns to look at how these writers attempt to define the “nation”. In a postcolonial sphere, they strive to tackle unsolved problems and issues in the nation, such as the effects of the Cold War or residual colonialism on the region. They also explore the power struggles of the oppressed in the manifold relations of power. As members of the minority groups—the ethnic (the Chinese and Indian) and the linguistic (the Sinophone and Anglophone)—these writers not only work in resistance against a major, hegemonic power, but also build lateral relations with other minorities. In doing so, they arguably become members of civil society who seek a just society. Through writing, they attain literary citizenship to enter the public sphere, in which they establish symbiotic connections with other minority subjects. This becomes a means of questioning the real hegemonic power and the hauntology exerted by the Cold War. In this dissertation, I juxtapose two “minor” groups, namely the Sinophone and Anglophone communities, to examine the identity formation of the articulators, as well as to ponder over the poetics that mediate their writings.

V. Relation in Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian Literature

Challenging monolingual paradigm: a colonial legacy

Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa (“language is the soul of nation”) is a slogan invented by *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (The Institute of Language and Literature) to promote the Malay national language policy. It purports that language is important to the nation as a soul to an individual. Language policies play

important roles in the formation of national consciousness in Malaysia, and the changing and planning of policies arguably reveal certain power relations and objectives that the policy-makers take on. To explicate the conflicts of language policies in Malaysia, critics usually refer to the 1967 National Language Act and its amendments in 1971. These acts affirm that Malay is to be the national language and that it replaces English as the sole official language. Under this scheme, Chinese, Tamil and other minority languages are marginalized in the monolingual national discourse, despite the fact that a large numbers of citizens still hold on to “their languages” that form the constellation of multilingual Malaysia.

When I put inverted commas around “their languages”, I intend to call into question what Yasemin Yildiz calls the “monolingual paradigm”, which asserts every ethnic group or every nation should possess one language as distinctively their own, such as the mother tongue. In other words, this paradigm has essentially linked the possession of language to “an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation”, ignoring the creolization of language (2). Yildiz further proposes the enactment of multilingual practice in a “postmonolingual” condition, in which the language and ethnicity can be “delinked” (17). It is noteworthy at here that Yildiz condemns unreflexive multilingualism, which practices the logic of monolingual paradigm, because it works in tandem with the logic of multiculturalism that Žižek, Huggan and

Miyoshi attack, as earlier demonstrated. In this section, I will retrieve the mentality of the monolingual paradigm in Malaysia dating back to the colonial period, then to the period of post-independence. Following that, I will look at the Relation of the two linguistic sphere in the national imagination. By linking Sinophone and the Anglophone in this dissertation, I challenge the monolingual paradigm that has been in practice in Malaysia, hoping to “delink” ethnicity and language, so as to overcome the “ethnic paradigm”.

As a direct result of the 1969 racial riots, many Malaysians see the intertwined relationships between the monolingual language policy, education policy, cultural policy and the New Economic Policy as an attempt to consolidate the supremacy of the Malay culture. As I have stated, contemporary Malaysian discourse tends to ascribe many aspects of the current situations to the 1969 incident, without contemplating deeply and historically the formation and factors of certain phenomena, such as the lacuna of 1948. To unravel the entanglements of language, ethnicity, culture and nation in Malaysia, one needs to revisit the colonial impact on the current situation. Without decolonizing the linguistic cultural identity, we can never embrace a genuine multiculturalism in Malaysia. However, by decolonizing, I do not mean the simple logic of rejecting the colonial language (English) and reinstalling the “native” language (Malay) in this newly independent state. Instead, I refer it to a reflective and reflexive process of self-examination (and sometimes self-negation) of the ideological

jouissance of the colonized, especially in terms of the anxious construction of an ethnic-based national identity in the wake of independence.

Before unravelling the tensions of language policies, one has to recognize that the current economic and cultural categorizations in Malaysia have been inherited from the “divide-and-rule” policy that the British colonizers adopted for ethnic management. The colonial power arguably (over)simplistically divided the three main races and enclosed them in their own social and geographical landscape: the Malays stay in their rural *kampung* (village) as peasants or fishermen; the Chinese immigrants work at tin mines or as merchants in urban towns; the Indians immigrants work as labourers in the rubber estates. The division also shaped the geopolitical landscape of the education system in Malaya. Since each ethnic group had their own spaces in different economic sectors, they established vernacular schools that met their own needs.

The inseparable twins: language and education

During this time, the colonizers supported the plan to educate Malays and Indians. The Malays were seen as indigenous population that the British “felt a clear commitment to”, while the Indians were also seen as obligations to the British because they were brought in from the British East-India company in Calcutta (Asmah 342). As for the Chinese, they had built their own schools with donations from the wealthy merchants. Compared to Malays and Indians, the

Chinese had greater chances of entering secondary schools or even universities¹² (342). In addition, British colonizers would build English-medium schools (usually funded by missionary organizations) for the middle class locals and these English-educated graduates would later serve in the government offices (342). During that time, education in all schools was not tasked with nation-building, so there was no common curriculum (Lee H.G. 211). Undoubtedly, such a generalizing constellation compartmentalizes each ethnic group into one linguistic sphere, neglecting the creolization of cultures and languages during the period. Firstly, this manner of categorization ignores the hybridity of the *Peranakan* community; many of them initially spoke Baba Malay and later switched to colonial English. Secondly, it also neglects the multilinguality of each linguistic group, as these Chinese and Indian immigrants come from different provinces of their homelands and thus speak in different dialects. Moreover, this structure neither specifies nor accounts for the education situations of the different classes. Nevertheless, Asmah's delineation provides a general image of the colonial social management in pre-independent Malaya, showing how language and education in Malaysia has always been linked.

During the negotiation of independence in the 1950s, there was a call to set the Malay language as the medium of instruction alongside English. The Barnes Report released in 1951 and suggested that all vernacular schools be

¹² This is also why many Chinese were actively involved in the nationalist revolutions in China because their curriculum and textbooks were from China.

transformed into “national schools” in which all children of Malaya would be taught Malay and English. It was an attempt to end the Chinese and Indian vernacular schools and to replace them with a common education system that upheld the “national language” and the colonial language. Naturally, the report was objected to by most of Chinese and Indians. It prompted the writing of the Fenn-Wu Report in the same year. This report defended the vernacular system as a viable alternative. One year before the declaration of independence, the 1956 Razak Report attempted to find a compromise, maintaining the Malay language to be the main medium of instruction while retaining all other vernacular schools. However, the Razak Report foreshadowed what would eventually become the “ultimate objective” of the education policy: a unified national education system for all races to undertake the national language as the main medium of instruction.

Due to the negotiation of independence, all camps eventually accepted the less controversial Education Ordinance in 1957 to work together towards the newly independent state. However, the triumph did not last long. The 1961 Education Act was introduced, and it was based on the 1960 Rahman Talib Report. It divided all government-subsidized schools into “national schools” (Malay as teaching language) and “national-type schools” (non-Malay as teaching language). At a secondary level, all Chinese schools had to choose between restructuring into government-subsidized national-type schools, which

would adhere to the government curriculum and language policy, or remain sole Chinese-medium private schools, which would give them the opportunity to establish their own curriculum (reportedly there were no Tamil secondary schools during which time). By the end of 1962, 54 out of 70 Chinese secondary schools in Peninsular Malaya accepted government subsidization, while the remaining 16 became private schools and continued to survive wholly on donations. Before long, some restructured schools decided to switch back into being private schools. When Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaysia in 1963, the number of private Chinese-medium schools permitted in the country was capped at around 60. Later, the 1967 National Language Act enforced the 10-year promise that was made during Independence and declared Malay the sole official language of the country; English retreated from the arena.

Some critics see the transition from English to Malay in the political landscape as “a way of desensitization and distancing of its colonial past” (Asmah 354). Hence, it is not surprising that the once English-Malay bilingual writer Muhammad Haji Salleh decided to write his creative works only in Malay, questioning provocatively whether he should “lick the hand that strangles [his] language and culture” (qtd. in Quayum “One Sky” 20.) However, the ambivalent attitude towards the colonial language does not end at this stage, as the anxiety towards globalization and the hegemony of English in the world has prompted the rulers to consider changing the medium of teaching in certain subjects from

Malay to English again. Even until today, the policies are still being hesitantly modified. Among other things, it is salient that the process of decolonization has yet to take place in Malaysia. As I have mentioned above, decolonization does not refer to the simple logic of rejecting English and reinstalling Malay. Instead, it is a continual intellectual exercise to excavate the ideology of linguistic cultural identity and to question the remnants of colonial knowledge in contemporary Malaysia; this includes examining the divide-and-rule policy, the draconian Sedition laws, the Internal Security Act (ISA) and so on.

In Part III of this chapter, I have probed into the (il)legitimacy of the ruling elites' strategy to join hands with the British in the making of a new nation. This same logic can be applied to the examination of the language policy. The ideology of building an ethnic-based national language is in fact inherited from colonial knowledge, where the Malay ruling elites refused to acknowledge the multilingual situation already existing in grassroots Malaya. The promotion of *Bahasa Melayu* ("Malay language") to *Bahasa Malaysia* ("Malaysian language") was to elevate the status of one language to cover the entire race, then finally to the entire nation. Moreover, this social contract was protected by a convoy of draconian laws. They existed to prevent any dissent from arising. Furthermore, when preventive detention laws such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) were enacted and implemented to combat the communist "insurgency", it also deepened the impact of the Cold war on Malaya. The action of *Operasi Lalang*

("Weeding Operation")¹³ in 1987 is a very good example of how state policy was used to curtail public expression and dissent.

To sort out the historical changes of the education system in Malaysia, it is important to recognize the fact that language policies are an oft-contested field in civil society. We also need to see how elite articulators employ a monolingual paradigm to reject a multilingual reality. In this paradigm, ethnicity and language are interlocked intimately, and public discussion of such issues is muzzled. Nevertheless, the bottom-up responses from certain civil communities have also regrettably echoed from a different perspective the monolingual paradigm. The leading Chinese associations, for example, have unconsciously internalized the "divide-and-rule" policy by enclosing their community into an absolute entity of applying the logic of one ethnicity one language. Chinese educators arguably confine themselves to the logic of linguistic allegiance and an ethnical sense of crisis. The discourse of victimology has always been applied to incite ethnic sentiments¹⁴. The Chinese language in Malaysia was upheld and protected as an identitarian passport by interested parties. It has been seen as a

¹³ *Operasi Lalang* was carried out during the ruling of the then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. On 27 October 1987, under the infamous Internal Security Act (ISA), the police arrested more than hundreds activists, opposition politicians, intellectuals, students etcetera. These arrests were made ostensibly to prevent 1969 racial riots from happening again. The direct cause of this incident was the Ministry of Education's appointments of some 100 non-Chinese-educated senior officers and principals to the nationwide Chinese vernacular primary schools. This led to massive objections from the Chinese associations and later gave rise to the mirror response from the radical UMNO Youth.

¹⁴ See the articles collected in *Dong Zong Thirty Years*. KL: The United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia, 1987; and *Dong Zong Fifty Years*. KL: The United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia, 2004.

right to claim Chinese identity without recognizing its organic multilinguality and creolization. In this case, being “Chinese” in Malaysia has always signified the homology of a single ethnicity and a single language, which ignores the creolization of culture and language such as in the case of Peranakan community. In contrast, this dissertation seeks to “delink” ethnicity and language, and return to the poetics.

Relationing two linguistic spheres: The Sinophone and the Anglophone

In this regard, this dissertation sets out to effect communication between the two linguistic spheres, exploring the problems that the two communities share, such as their national imaginaries. Undoubtedly, the two “minor literature” have yet to interact with each other effectively, let alone communicate with the “major” literature (Malay) of the country. Translation and comparative works among different linguistic spheres remain deficient in the Malaysian literary field, as not many writers and critics have crossed this linguistic boundary. This phenomenon supports my argument that each ethnic community in Malaysia still upholds the logic of monolingual paradigm, which results in a lack of communication between groups.

As a pioneering attempt to effect communication between multilingual Malaysian literatures, there was a short-story collection in Chinese published in 2008. It was titled *Huidao Malaiya: Huama Xiaoshuo Qishinian, 1937-2007* (Return

to Malaya: Stories by ethnic Chinese Malaysian Writers, 1937-2007; 回到馬來亞：華馬小說七十年). The editors are Tee Kim Tong (張錦忠), Ng Kim Chew and Chong Fah Hing, who respectively specialise in Malaysian literatures in English, Chinese and Malay. They collected 29 pieces of short stories from the three languages, and had the English and Malay texts translated into Chinese. Each editor also wrote an insightful foreword unscrambling the literary history of the three communities. Interestingly, the title *Return to Malaya* invites the readers to return to the colonized Malaya in 1937, when national borders were still a rather vague idea, and the monolingual paradigm had yet to impact greatly upon literary works. This collection is an important input to the Malaysian literary scene, mapping out the dynamic multilingual constellation of its literature(s). There has been no other input in this area.

As a result, this dissertation attempts to fill the gaps of comparative literature in Malaysia, unravelling the politics of language employed by literary actors. I set out to juxtapose the newly minted category of “Sinophone discourse”¹⁵ with Anglophone postcolonial discourse in the Malaysian context, where these terms and frameworks have a partially valid but also problematic coverage. Anglophone/Postcolonial studies and the Sinophone discourse reveal two lines of thoughts, each focusing on one linguistic sphere. It is important to note that each approach has its individual predicaments when applied to the

¹⁵ For definition of the Sinophone, please see Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai and Brian Bernards (eds) *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*.

Malaysian context. Postcolonial discourse relies too much on texts written in English, and on diasporic writers who migrated to the West. Hence it fails to address the Sinophone community, as well as Tamil and other language writings in Malaysia, although they were also colonized subjects. Similarly, Sinophone discourse suggests an integration of a worldwide Sinophone community in order to resist China-centrism, but it fails to solve the multilingual ambiguity of Chinese Malaysians. It is also unable to provide a space for Chinese immigrants who adopt a different language, such as the case of Chinese Anglophone writers in Malaysia. Both discourses are limited and delineated in one specific linguistic sphere. Hence, it is risky when one only adopts a single approach to explain the whole Malaysian literary landscapes and cultures.

“Sinophone”, as a newly minted term, has been widely discussed by scholars like Dominic Cheung, David Der-wei Wang, Shih Shu-mei, Jing Tsu, Cynthia Sau-ling Wong and Tee Kim Tong in recent years. It resonates with Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone discourse, although it does not directly reflect a colonial background. While the former terms are used to describe literatures that come from the formerly colonized parts of the world, Sinophone, in contrast, does not have an implicit colonial link. It denotes the offshoots of Chinese literature that flourish outside Mainland China, while endeavoring to move away from a China-centric literary history.

In one important formulation of the Sinophone, America-based critic Shih Shu-mei sharply states that Sinophone literature should be separated from China-centric Chinese literature, and it has to be a minority literature ("Against Diaspora" 29-48). For Shih, literature written in the Chinese-language and produced outside Mainland China is "Sinophone literature". In addition, as a result of internal colonialism in China, texts written by minority communities, such as those from Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, should be included in the category. Shih promotes a place-based concept of the Sinophone, which defines clearly that Sinophone literature should be taken into account as "local" literature that is tied to the place it is based. For David Wang, in contrast, Sinophone literature should be porous and inclusive, and it should bridge the gap with Mainland Chinese literature, as the latter appears to be hybrid in its configuration (Wang D.D.W. "Wenxue" n.p.). A Sinophone Malaysian residing in Taiwan, Tee Kim Tong in turn posits that Sinophone literature should be both place-based and mobile. It should exclude Mainland Chinese literature from its grand narrative and should be mobile at the same time because the Sinophone community can move from place to place, as in the case of Sinophone Malaysian literary actors in Taiwan ("[Re]mapping" 77-92).

Shih offers a clear-cut definition of Sinophone discourse to set it apart from the well-worn essentialist theory of "Chinese overseas/ Overseas Chinese" and "Chineseness", which centres China as a privileged place of origin. These

existing discourses imply a dichotomy of what is “domestic/overseas”, and what is “central/peripheral”. They tend to read literature written outside Mainland China as not being authentic when compared with literature written in the “original” homeland. In contrast, Shih’s “Sinophone” formulation aims to question this dichotomy and highlight the authenticity and uniqueness of various Sinophone communities which stand on their own feet and do not necessarily need a connection to contemporary China. At the same time, Shih also calls into question Western-centric modernity and the dominant notion of diaspora in Anglophone literary discussion. She poignantly argues that “diaspora has an expiration date; one cannot say one is diasporic after three hundred years, and everyone should be given a chance to become a local” (“The Concept” 713-714). In this regard, Sinophone literature, as well as Anglophone and other minority literatures in Malaysia, should be considered as significant parts of Malaysian literature, all of which contribute to a specifiable Malaysian identity.

Sinophone Malaysian literature has occupied a significant place in the worldwide Sinophone discourse because of its distinctive features, even though it remains marginal in reception in the Chinese-speaking world¹⁶. Nonetheless, the ideas “infused” into the Malaysian literary scene by Sinophone theory are not

¹⁶ For the literary history, see Fang Xiu 方修’s *Mahua xin wenxue da xi* 馬華新文學大系 and *Mahua xin wen xue jianshi* 馬華新文學簡史; for brief introduction, see Tee Kim Tong 張錦忠, *Ma lai xi ya huayu yuxi wenxue* 馬來西亞華語語系文學 and “Sinophone Malaysian Literature: An Overview.”

new. The calling for local recognition of Sinophone Malaysian literature was generated even before the nation-state was born. Beginning largely as an echo of the May Fourth Movement of Mainland China, Sinophone Malaysian literature has undergone several ideological debates. Initially, many overseas Chinese perceived the Mainland as their homeland. At that time, the writers still saw China as the source of their cultural roots, and their literary imaginaries were normally projected towards the homeland. This cultural allegiance, however, changed dramatically in post-war 1940s, when leftist groups carried out nation-building endeavours in Malaya. Debates on the “uniqueness” (*dutexing* 獨特性) of Sinophone Malaysian literature sprang up in 1947 and 1948, and this propelled writers to inject their critical energy into issues of local recognition to the place where they were based¹⁷. It is worth mentioning that one literary pioneer who ignited the debate was Jin Zhimang (金枝芒) (whose pseudonym was Zhou Rong (周容)), a Malayan communist writer who initiated written polemics with famous modern Chinese writer Hu Yuzhi (胡愈之) who was travelling in Nanyang at the time.

As a legacy taken from China, written polemics were not uncommon in the Sinophone Malaysian literary field. From the 1940s to late 90s, whether it was the historical controversy over the allegiances of “Chineseness” or localism, the criticism over the lacking of “canons” (*jingdian quexi* 經典缺席), or the aesthetic

¹⁷ See Fang Xiu 方修, *Mahua wenyi sichao de yanbian* 馬華文藝思潮的演變.

debates over modernism and realism, the local literary field has always shown great vitality, even before the theory of the “Sinophone” exposed it to international audiences¹⁸. The Sinophone Malaysian literary community is a dynamic and strongly consolidated platform where writers and critics interact and contest within and beyond national borders. Among other things, the (re)migration of Sinophone Malaysian writers to Taiwan has made the Taiwan a dominant field for their literary activities. Worth mentioning also are earlier Malaysian student writers in Taiwan, such as Wen Rui’an and Fang E’zhen, whose “*Shenzhou Poetry Society*” (神州詩社) (1976-1980) remains a legendary input to both Taiwanese and Malaysian literature.¹⁹ Contemporary writers like Ng Kim Chew, Chang Kuei-hsing, Li Yong Ping, and critics like Tee Kim Tong and Ko Chia-cian have also brought forward the visibility of Sinophone Malaysian literature in the global Chinese literary scene.

In Taiwan, the title “Overseas Compatriot Student” has given to overseas Chinese students, encouraging them to return to their “motherland” (Republic of China) to receive proper Chinese education. The policy was implemented after the Kuomintang government’s move to Taiwan, and has been in practice until

¹⁸ For written polemics on Sinophone Malaysian literature, see Zhang Yong Xiu 張永修, Zhang Guang Da 張光達 and Lin Chun Mei 林春美 (eds).

¹⁹ The members of the poetry society were predominantly Malaysian students studying in Taiwan, and they were famous for their modernist poetry and martial arts fiction. During the martial law period in Taiwan, their works were seen by the Kuomintang government as “propaganda for the communists” (*weifei xuanchuan* 為匪宣傳) and the society leaders Fang and Wen were detained for three months and were deported.

now (I “benefited” from this policy too during my undergraduate studies in Taiwan). The long-term phenomenon of Chinese Malaysian students studying in Taiwan is arguably a product of the Cold War. During that time, disrupted communication between communist China and Malaysia made studying in China almost impossible for Malaysians. However, the situation started to loosen up in the 1990s. The division of the two Chinas has affected the politics of recognition of Chinese Malaysians towards Chinese culture. Not a few Sinophone Malaysian writers have tried to respond to this rupture. For example, writer and critic Ng Kim Chew calls into question the general pursuit of so-called cultural “Chineseness” (*zhongguoxing* 中國性) by many Chinese Malaysians. He wrote an essay dealing with “the south where the language is lost”, tracing the route that Chinese immigrants in Malaysia took in order to write Sinophone literature (but not Standard Chinese or Malay), when facing the centrifugal environment, cultures and languages in Malaysia (Ng “Sinophone/Chinese”).

In a way, the Sinophone language is a medium for a literary or cinematic re-examination of history and culture. In contrast, English, with its colonial background, allows writers to self-consciously respond to colonial history. In this project, I intend to use the “Anglophone” with a wider meaning than it usually entails. Echoing the dynamic articulations of the Sinophone, I also consider the locality and hybridity of the Anglophone language; and I do not see Anglophone Malaysian writing as merely “English-language” writing from an ex-colony. The

process of writing, for both Sinophone and Anglophone writers, enacts the process of possession and dispossession of languages simultaneously. Anglophone writer Preeta Samarasan, for example, adopts a subverted and (re)appropriated form of English—one that is creolized and naturalized (see Chapter 2). She also provides insight into the paradoxical logic of having a “national language” in Malaysia, and eventually allows her characters to reclaim Malay as being their own, to avoid its use in state-led “supremacist” ideology.

“Anglophone Malaysian literature” usually denotes English-language writing produced by Malaysian writers inside or outside Malaysia. Similar to the Sinophone language that rejects the standardization of Chinese language, Anglophone writers do not write Standard English. Instead, the language has within it a mixture of Malaysian expressions. For Anglophone Malaysian writers, their identity formation is much more ambiguous than other Malaysian writers as the cultures they correspond to are not directly attached to ethnicity. In particular, more layers of relationships and recognition take shape in the construction of identity among Anglophone Malaysians, among them the most important one being the *Peranakan* (literally “local-born person”) Straits-Chinese community in Malaysia, which came into being by inter-ethnic marriage a few centuries ago.

The Babas and Nyonyas (male and females *peranakan*) were part of the Nusantara world²⁰ before British colonization, and the community prospered in the nineteenth century (Tan Chee Beng 49.) They adapted local culture and language quickly, while at the same time retaining their traditional Chinese culture. During the British colonial period, unlike the “immigrants Chinese” who arrived Malaya only in the 19th century, Peranakan Chinese were “[politically] oriented towards Malaya and loyal to the British government” (49). Many of them switched to English and were held in high regard in political and social positions. However, by the time of Malaya independence, they had not only lost their economic and political influence, but had also been absorbed by the ruling elites into the “immigrants Chinese” category, while at the same time being rejected by the non-peranakan Chinese as being Malay-like (50). Under the exclusive ethnic division scheme, they were too Chinese for the Malays, and too Malay for the Chinese. Their native language— Baba Malay—is nearly extinct now and has yet to be fully studied empirically. With mixtures of Malay and Chinese dialects in its romanized form, Baba Malay is essentially a result of and enactment of creolization. Yet, the existing texts today written by the Peranakan writers are mainly in English. Among these, *The Straits Chinese Magazine* (1897-

²⁰ “Nusantara” is an old Javanese word for “archipelago”. “Nusantara world” is used to describe the cultural grouping of Malay(sia), Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines.

1907) edited by Lim Boon Kheng (林文慶) and Song Ong Siang (宋旺相) eventually gave rise to local English-language creative writing in Malaya.

Writers like Ee Tiang Hong, Wong Phui Nam, Chuah Guat Eng and Shirley Geok-lin Lim are from the Peranakan community. Born in the 30s and 40s, they witnessed and experienced dramatic economic and political changes in the positions of Peranakan Chinese in Malay(si)a and Singapore. Apart from them, immigrant Chinese and Indian writers also contribute to the Anglophone literary field, for example Lyold Fernando, K.S. Maniam, Lee Kok Liang, Hilary Tham and others who are significant names in Malaysian literary history. In general, writers from the earlier generation constantly deal with the issues of nation-building, while new generation writers such as Tash Aw, Tan Twan Eng, Rani Manicka, Preeta Samarasan and Beth Yahp are, thanks to globalization, familiar to international audiences.

Essentially a colonial product, Anglophone Malaysian literature straddles the ambiguity of cultural bond to one language and affiliation to Malay(si)a. Most of the writers above attended English schools in Malaya, and that significantly affected their writing. Critics believe that Anglophone Malaysian writers tend to produce their works dominantly in the shadow of classical British authors such as Jonathan Swift, and then the modernist pioneers like T.S. Eliot, Yeats, Dylan Thomas and more (Souza 2-12). After the Second World War, the creation of the English Department at the University of Malaya and the founding

of a literary publication *The New Cauldron* in 1949 were seen as the initial stage of infusing “local colour” into literature. It also marked a serious attempt at “founding” Malayan literature in English and at “Malayanizing” that literature (Souza 2-12). This process seems to follow the same broad procedures as the Sinophone literary field.

However, until now, unlike the Sinophone sphere, the Anglophone Malaysian literary field has yet to consolidate a strong, distinctive community that provides a platform for writers and critics to interact closely. This is partly because of the political separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965, where many English-educated writers were based. Moreover, the declining status of English and the monocultural regime in Malaysia in the 1960s generated a big wave of diaspora in the community. For example, Shirley Geok-lin Lim migrated to the United States in 1969 with the intention of never returning, Ee Tiang Hong left for Australia in 1975, and the newer generation of Anglophone writers base themselves in the metropolitan centres where English is the major language.

It is noteworthy that these diasporic Malaysian literatures are usually categorized under the broad terms of “Asian American literature” or “British Asian literature”. They are examined under the rubric of diaspora, transnationalism and so on without deep reflection on the distinctive histories of Malaysia. Such critical perspectives, I argue, overlook the specificities of Anglophone Malaysian literature, in particular the specificities of its response to

the cultural locales of a Southeast Asian setting. As Edward Said puts forward in his "Traveling Theory", when criticisms, ideas and theories travel "from person to person", "from situation to situation", theory must also change to prefer a "local, detailed analysis" (Said "Traveling" 227). As I mentioned in Part IV above, the calling for a "transnational turn" and postnational flexibilities in literary studies often overlooks the national consciousness of works. What is more, it might promote unreflective multiculturalism and exotic commodification. Hence, this project seeks to bring Anglophone literature "back" to Malaysia by engaging it with Sinophone literature in order to bring to light the historical contexts of oppression and inequality and also to challenge the monolingual paradigm.

VI. Chapter Divisions

In addition to this Introduction, this dissertation includes four more chapters, each of which compares and examines two authors from respectively the Sinophone and Anglophone spheres. On the one hand, these chapters can be read collectively as aspects of Cold War imaginaries operating in multilingual Malaysia. On the other hand, they can also be read independently as relational comparisons of the two literatures. In this regard, Chapter 2 "Narrating Post-1969 Structure of Feeling" revisits the official historiography of the May 13 incident. It examines the works of Sinophone writer Li Zishu and Anglophone

writer Preeta Samarasan, who set their first novels during the May 13 riot. By tracing the post-1969 structure of feeling, both writers excavate the racialized national history and seek to supplement these narratives through gendered and class critiques. Chapter 3 “Cold War and the Postcolonial Gothic” probes into the Gothic site of Cold War struggles. It examines the works of Sinophone writer Chang Kuei-hsing and Anglophone writer Beth Yahp, looking at how they deconstruct the “common fear” built up by official rhetoric and ideology, and how they restore the historical landscape of the Cold War through Gothic depiction. Both of these texts are bildungsromans. They also highlight the politics of “Othering” that take place in the process of nation-building and attempt to work towards a “reconciliation” with communist history. Chapter 4 “Mapping the South Seas”, reveals the geocritical concern of two writers Ng Kim Chew and Tash Aw as they capture the history of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. They arguably spatialize regional history to open up a space for transnational discussion on shared cultural history and memory, working towards releasing the repressed memory of the Cold War. Chapter 5 “Reconsidering *Adat*, Modernity and Distribution” deals with mnemonic articulations in literary and cinematic texts that capture commonalities and create a common culture in Malaysia. Significantly, Anglophone writer Chuah Guat Eng and Sinophone filmmaker generate in-depth explorations of the Malay cultural system, and eventually uncover the ethnic veil covered by the Cold War residues.

As a whole, I argue that it is urgent to look at the problematic formation of national imaginings in Third World literature by means of a situated framework, as opposed to searching for a flexible “postnational” identity. By positioning a discussion based at the Cold War peripheries, I call into question the ethnic paradigm in contemporary Malaysian discourse, and argue that it is the state’s means of hindering critical reflection on Malaysia’s colonial history and the Cold War. Furthermore, by studying the poetics of Relation of Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian literature, this dissertation seeks to offer a new approach to revealing the overlooked structure of power/knowledge operating in Malaysian literary studies. This approach uses the method of relational comparison to trace a related but different lines of inquiry in the same conjuncture. It therefore examines the poetics that make up the inquiries and imagination, breaking through the monolingual paradigm that hinders mutual understanding of the multilingual constellation of Malaysian literature.

Chapter Two: Narrating Post-1969 Structures of Feeling

Li Zishu's *The Era of Farewell* and Preeta Samarasan's *Evening is the Whole Day*

We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies. These are more often recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations. By that time the case is different; a new **structure of feeling** will usually already have begun to form, in the true social present. (Raymond Williams "Marxism and Literature" 132; bold added)

The inter-reference between history and fiction has long been an important motif for many fiction writers. The interwoven, internal relations between the two are not only manifested in the genre of historical fiction but also in fiction that captures the continuity of historical, social experience that is still "in process" in contemporary times. Often it is in this seemingly private, isolated, fictional narration of experience that one finds the historical and social embeddedness that constitutes a "structure of feeling", which defines a collective historical experience or era. In Malaysia, 1969 marks a symbolic watershed because it set

an entirely new cultural, ethnic and social agenda for the country. Thus writers who write imaginatively and creatively about this period perform an important function, because they potentially construct a new “post”-1969 structure of feeling for the country²¹.

The May 13 racial riots and its aftermath have since deepened the contradictions in ethnic relationships affecting the country. Three days after the election on 10 May 1969, in which the Alliance suffered an unprecedented loss to opposition parties, racial riots broke out in Kuala Lumpur. A state of Emergency was declared on May 13, and Malaysia was ruled by the caretaker government, National Operation Council (NOC), from 1969 to 1971. According to official figures, 196 died, 439 were injured and 9143 were arrested (NOC 85). The “official history” of these “riots” has asserted that the events occurred “spontaneously” and that they will happen again if the status quo is shaken in Malaysia, that is, if the privileged status of Malays is questioned. The government policies that followed the riots imposed the concept of “*Ketuanan Melayu*” (Malay Dominance), which affirmed the supremacy of Malays. In this ideology, non-Malays were seen as disturbers of the status quo. Among them, the communists and the leftist sympathizers, who were mainly ethnic Chinese from the opposition camp, were

²¹ In this thesis, I use post-1969 to refer to a historical period after the riots *and* the unfinished business that the riots leave behind, likening to the “post” in “postcolonial”. More particularly, hereinafter, I use it to suggest a new situation that escapes the racist logic of May 13.

accused by the then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman of being co-conspirators partially responsible for the May 13 incident.

This chapter, however, will question the official historiography of these events and try to locate the May 13 events within a larger global Cold War structure. It is of the view that the (right-wing) state capitalist class played the race card to conceal imbalanced income distribution, as well as to overturn the aristocratic ruling class who had been in power since independence (Kua 3). It then highlights the importance of fiction writing as a “bottom-up” response that allows us to trace “structures of feeling” embedded in the post-1969 era. Furthermore, this chapter strives to provide a gendered reading of events portrayed in the two novels under discussion, namely *The Era of Farewell* by Li Zishu and *Evening is the Whole Day* by Preeta Samarasan. It argues against the prevalent patriarchal nationalism in postcolonial criticism and showcases how female writers tackle the problematic articulations of nation and ethnicity through their gendered criticism. It argues that, to a significant extent, these writers explore and question hegemonic cultural politics in Malaysia and seek to reclaim history through fiction.

Focusing on two contemporary Malaysian novels written by post-1969 female writers, this chapter will first look at the significance of the May 13, 1969 incident and the subsequent policies that were adapted by the state apparatus, which impacted the notions of nation and ethnic identity in Malaysia. This will provide a backdrop against which the two novels are read. The chapter not only

revisits the incident *per se*, but also examines the relationship between the subjective self and politics that define the post-1969 generation in terms of the shapings of what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling”. Following that, it will compare the two novels and analyse the various methods the writers’ use to (re)construct a “post”-1969 identity.

Phantom of Cold War, Spectre of May 13

Among the reports that have been published on the May 13 incident ²², the important counter-discourse written by the social scientist and human-rights activist Kua Kia Soong is the most noteworthy. In a comprehensive report that questions official historiography, he asserts that the incident was above all “a coup d’etat by the then emergent Malay state capitalist class to depose the Tunku who represented the outdated Malay aristocracy” (Kua 3). He further claims that the incident was in fact an orchestrated political conspiracy by the new Malay state capitalist class (headed by Tun Razak, the successor of Tunku) who would then impose the infamous “New Economic Policy” (NEP) to ensure that the ideology of Malay supremacy remained protected by racist policies. In other words, the entire national arena had shifted towards racialization and

²² Most are official documents published right after the riots, for example, *May 13 Tragedy: A Report* (1969), published by the NOC, or *May 13 Before and After* (1969) by Tunku Abdul Rahman himself. Some unofficial research reports are: Lee Kam Hing’s *The May Tragedy in Malaysia: A Collection of Essays* (1969), Felix V. Gagliano’s *Communal Violence in Malaysia 1969: The Political Aftermath* (1970), Leon Comber’s *13 May 1969: A Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations* (1983) and others. These texts more or less focus mainly on the dispute and violence between Chinese and Malays, and their observations were freshly made after the riots.

bumiputraism. Hence, for historian activist Farish A. Noor, May 13 was not the result of racial conflict, “but rather the blueprint for further racial and religious polarization” (Farish “A million”).

To grasp May 13 in its proper historical context, one cannot overlook the global structure in the 60s, which is shrouded by the shadow of the Cold War. In this regard, the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, which includes Peninsular Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak, was essentially a neo-colonial strategy aimed at controlling the spread of communism. It was arguably also an imperialist strategy, undertaken with the help of the Malay ruling class, to ignore completely the democratic demands for autonomy of the latter three states. Singapore, a Chinese dominant state, left Malaysia two years later following the 1964 general election and two racial riots erupted few months afterwards²³. The fiercely-contested power struggles between the UMNO-led Alliance, Singapore’s People’s Action Party (PAP), socialist groups such as Barisan Sosialis, and the Indonesian-led *Konfrontasi* movement, have shaped the political constellation during 1960s. In which, the withdrawal of Singapore from Malaysia altered the political situation in favor of UMNO, and the emergent state capitalist class would soon try to usurp power from the old aristocratic ruling elites through the realization of the May 13 racial riot (Hua 136).

²³ See Chapter One for more detailed description.

At the height of the global Cold War, the ruling party propagated its capitalist ideas in the name of wiping out the communist threat. Significantly, this was done through the playing of a race card. Soon after the May 13 incident, parliament was dissolved, a state of Emergency was declared, and the caretaker government—led by the deputy PM Tun Abdul Razak—ruled the country with its “own” law for more than two years. At this stage, Malay sovereignty could reign over the country and act beyond the rule of law in the name of the public good. This act is akin to what Giorgio Agamben calls “the state of exception”—the suspension of the rule of law as a “rule” of the sovereignty’s political order.

In this political order, the state arguably used the tactic of stirring up racial sentiments to suppress freedom of expression and to navigate society towards the global capitalist camp. Also, it is important to note that this tactic, I argue, is a resurfacing and reenactment of the colonial power inherited from the British by the postindependent regime to continually divide and rule. In other words, the May 13 incident itself was initiated by radical right-wing nationalists to wipe out the remnants of socialist power and also the power of the moderate Malay aristocracy via the use of methods that have a distinct colonial legacy. As mentioned in the Introduction, the “lacuna” of 1948 was crucial in defining the discourse of Malay hegemony in Malaysia, thus the lacuna of 1969 simply reconsolidated it in fear of losing Malay supports. The right-wing nationalists played the race card to deter challenges thrown at the ruling class, and in order to disguise the planned coup d’état, which would eventually guide the nation

towards integration with the global capitalist system, one that worked according to the logic of neo-colonialism. As a result, the shift of power from the aristocratic Malay ruling class to the radical Malay state capitalist class gave rise to more aggressive racist policies such as the NEP and NCP, and also nationalistic proclamations such as the *Rukun Negara* (National Principles). This “new Malaysia” agenda was arguably carried out at the expense of the paralysis of state mechanism during the emergency, for after that more communalist policies were implemented.

Malaysian political economist Hua Wu Yin has rightly pointed out that, the post-1969 governance formula adopted by the ruling Malay state bourgeoisie were carried out in the following manner:

...(I)nstead of focusing on remedying the particular needs of the various poor classes in the country, the state has chosen to blame the plight of the Malay peasantry on “Chinese dominance of the economy”, while foreign capital is presented as the unquestioned necessity for “development”. At the same time, the state’s *bumiputra* policy—involving support and subsidies to the farmers, vast amounts of state expenditure which it can afford while there is ample revenue—is intended to win over the allegiance of the whole Malay community while benefiting the wealthier strata only. (Hua 183)

In other words, the post-1969 “new Malaysia” agenda put forward race issues to cover up its endorsement of capitalist relations of production. Ethnic division became a strategic communalistic means to allow the state to progress in the

name of economic equality. Yet, in actuality, it clandestinely supported imperialist dominated economy and endorsed corruption. This might be seen as a prolonged “state of exception”, one that deprives individuals of the right to question the suspension of the rule of law, or to point out the illegitimacy of the law.

Since 1969, due to draconian laws, such as the Sedition Act and the infamous Internal Security Act that were introduced in the shadow of the Cold War and eventually became tools to curtail free expressions, public discussions of the May 13 incident have been rare. In the course of time, “May 13” became a symbol of violence that continues to haunt the subject formation of contemporary Malaysians, and has since shaped the collective experience of what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling” of post-1969 Malaysians. Without a doubt, after more than 40 years of silencing, people are now demanding that the truth be told, and that alternative sides of history be revisited.

Raymond Williams defines the term “structures of feeling” as “social experiences in *solution*”, unlike other social formations that have already been “precipitated” (133-4). In this case, since 1969—the watershed that generated a new Malaysia agenda—the changes in structures of feeling have been carefully felt and thought by Malaysians and are still in process. The works of fiction of the post-1969 generation contemplate this new phenomenology of “feeling”, and arguably combine the aesthetic *and* the political to portray new hoped-for “realities”.

The Fiction of May 13

The control over free speech is reflected in the literary scene as well²⁴. Tee Kim Tong has argued that as an immediate response to the incident, post-1969 (Sinophone) Malaysian writers tend to produce “light literature” with less historical/socio-political consciousness on the surface (Tee “Malai xiya huayu yuxi” 91). In other words, no “sensitive” issues such as the May 13 incident are to be brought up. However, the tense situation started to loosen up in the 1990s as literary works that more directly dealt with the incident were published²⁵. Among them were Beth Yahp’s “In 1969” (1991), Lloyd Fernando’s *Green is the Color* (1993), Chuah Guat Eng’s *Echoes of Silence* (1994), and Shirley Lim Geok-lin’s *Joss and Gold* (2001) and two novels that I am analyzing in this chapter — Preeta Samarasan’s *Evening is the Whole Day* and Li Zishu’s *The Era of Farewell*. For Lloyd Fernando, his most renowned work *Green is the Color* explores inter-ethnic love affairs after the riot. It straightforwardly and honestly portrays the conflicts and difficulties that racial groups in Malaysia were facing. Interestingly, Beth Yahp’s “In 1969”, Shirley Lim’s *Joss and Gold* and Preeta Samarasan’s novel coincidentally depict the tense situation during the May 13 riot when a woman

²⁴ For the artists’ response to the incident, please refer to Mark Teh’s “An-other May 13” (2013).

²⁵ This trend, interestingly, happened to coincide with the global structure of the Cold War in that period when the communist power collapsed in 1989.

enters into labour. Such a phenomenon shows that many individuals perceive “May 13” as a watershed that gives rise to a new generation.

“May 13” is kept alive differently by different individuals. Fiction writers, in this regard, perform their re-imagining of the real event through a fictional point of view. Instead of dwelling on official historiography, the fictionalization of May 13 arguably supplements the narratives of the iconic incident by deploying richer image and a deeper variety of feeling. In this way, the writers use their creative imagination to redeem history by extricating voiceless subjects from hegemonic history. Thus, this chapter is an examination of texts that allow a more complete understanding of that painful history. If “political May 13” has been constructed as a kind of Cold War conspiracy, the question that confronts us is how a “literary May 13” clears a path out of this conundrum. To answer this question, the narrative strategy that writers use to revisit the bloody historical event and portray a “post”-1969 structures of feeling is the main focus of this chapter.

More interestingly, both novels are not set in Kuala Lumpur, the main scene of the riots. Instead, they are set in Ipoh—a town in northern Malaysia. This chapter argues that in order to question the narrative of official historiography, literary fictions supplement the May 13 discourse with an alternative psyche and mentality. In particular, the mentioned writers employ a gendered critique to question patriarchal accounts of history and nationalism. They also showcase the post-1969 economic modernity project undertaken by the

ruling regime, which in fact works in tandem with international capitalism, and in which class struggles are often muzzled. Their novels examine subjectivities produced in the post-1969 era and the racialized historiography embedded in them.

Li Zishu and Preeta Samarasan belong to the post-1969 generation who never experienced the painful events themselves, but grew up in its shadow. Some of their predecessors who witnessed the incident were forced to react immediately, and the impacts of May 13 on them were far more significant. For instance, poets Shirley Lim Geok-lin and Ee Tiang Hong left the country in 1969 and 1975, respectively, while Wong Phui Nam took twenty years to publish his second volume of poetry, which only appeared in 1989. As Shirley Lim recalled in her memoir *Among the White Moon Faces*:

After 13, thousands of Malaysians like myself withdrew into mass depression...I had no nationalist idealism to imagine. The cultural parochialism that took shape in the aftermath of the riots in Malaysia, which includes race-based quotas, communalist politics, and separatist race-essentialized cultures, was absolute anathema to me. (Lim, S.G.L 204;272)

Lim published her first novel in 2002—more than twenty years after her first poetry collection appeared—one whose opening is set tellingly during the May 13 riot. Lim's novel, *Joss and Gold*, tells the story of a young Malaysian Chinese girl, Li An, who faces great personal turmoil during a period when the political

situation in Kuala Lumpur is also in crisis. Li An, who loves English literature, falls in love with an American Peace Corps volunteer, Chester Brookfield, despite being married to a wealthy Chinese Malaysian scientist, Henry Yeh. At the height of the May 13 riot, Li An and Chester make love and conceive a child. Lim's plot thus interrogates the intertwined relationships of racism, nationalism and colonialism that continue to shroud the new generations in Malaysia, and is poignantly revelatory when set aside the personal details revealed in her memoir.

Instead of experiencing direct trauma like their predecessors, post-1969 generation writers such as Li Zishu and Preeta Samarasan arguably suffer from a delayed traumatic experience. This makes them more curious about the past, and they thus feel the urgency to excavate or dig into it. As Cathy Caruth correctly puts it, a traumatic wound is not simply a pathology or illness. Instead,

it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its **delayed appearance** and its **belated address**, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (Caruth 4, emphasis added)

In other words, history is to be understood through the capturing of voices of wounds in the present moment. These wounds reside deep in the post-1969 writers' creative imagination, but precisely because of the delayed appearance, they allow writers to offer explanations that, in Williams' words, come "at a

reduced tension” (134). In this regard, the truth is to be further uncovered through the excavation of the traumatic memory that is inflicted upon the post-1969 generation. In the process, the new generation writers connect themselves to their predecessors, find linkages between their works and such writers, and arguably create new structures of feeling. In order to make sense of the past and its hold on current realities, Li Zishu and Preeta Samarasan illustrate the real and intricate everyday experiences that constantly shape the post-1969 structures of feeling. They combat the deficiency of historical narratives with literary fictions, refusing to forget the past. The two novels under discussion narrate respectively the Chinese and Indian ethnographic perspectives of post-1969 Malaysia. At the same time, they also resist the dominant *Bumiputra* ideology. As a whole, this chapter juxtaposes the two novels with the question of gender criticism to uncover the violence hidden in the post-1969 state-led nationalist and capitalist discourse. How does post-1969 literature intervene in such discourse—does it overturn or strengthen dominant narratives? How does gender critique facilitate our understanding of ethnic relations in the post-1969 era and manifest new structures of feeling? These are the questions that motivate my analysis in this chapter.

I mentioned above that both writers revisit official historiography through the use of a gendered critique. While they share this feature, there are also significant differences in their approach. Li arguably uses a metafictional technique to problematize the agency of writing histories and fictions. Yet her

strategy arguably lacks an emphatic and critical understanding of history and ends up being complicit with the logic of state capitalist discourse. In fact, narrating a May 13 story is perilous for it can easily fall into the logic of state-led narrative. In contrast Preeta Samarasan creates a disordered temporal structure to challenge unilinear and patriarchal narratives, and thus encourages us to look into the imbalances and iniquities of class society. Also, instead of seeking solution to address or counteract *Bumiputra* national language, Samarasan skillfully changes the definition of “national language” *per se* and eventually reclaims the language as one owned by “grassroots” individuals. In the section below I will first discuss Li Zishu’s *The Era of Farewell* and then move on to Samarasan’s book.

Li Zishu and the Metafictional “Big Book”

Born Lin Baoling (林寶玲) in Ipoh, Malaysia in 1971, Li Zishu (黎紫書) is a prolific and prodigious writer. Her works have won numerous awards in Malaysia and Taiwan, including the Huazong Literary Award (1995, 1996, 1997), the United Daily News Literary Prize (1996, 2000, 2005) and the China Times Literature Award (2005). What really marks Li as an extraordinary figure in contemporary Sinophone Malaysian literary context is her innate talent. This self-taught female writer never went to university or Chinese-medium high school, but instead worked as a full-time journalist, which is rare in Malaysia. In addition to that, unlike Ng Kim Chew, Li Yong Ping and Chang Kuei-hsin who

received education in Taiwan and now based at there, Li Zishu is a locally-educated and locally-based Sinophone writer whose mother tongue is not Mandarin but Cantonese. Hence, compared to other Sinophone writers in the literary marketplace, Li is conscious about representing a local voice in literature, even though she objects to the label “*Mahua* writer” (Sinophone/Chinese Malaysian writer). She sharply points out that unlike the Taiwan-based writers, she does not feel the need to deal with problems of identity, nation, history, or even “Chineseness” (Tee “Li Zishu fangwen ji” 208). Instead, she turns to human nature, one that she constantly feels the need to tackle. Her works explore human nature with dense and rich imagery, depicting the gloomy and magical landscape of Malaysia. Nonetheless, historical consciousness still forms the framework of most of her fictions, especially in *The Era of Farewell*. This is possibly why the renowned literary critic David Der-wei Wang describes her as an “explorer of the heart of darkness” who examines the dark sides of human nature closely (Wang “*Heian zhixin*” 3).

Li Zishu is well known for her short stories and micro-fiction, her published collections are *Tianguo Zhi Men* 天國之門 (Gate of Heaven, 1999), *Shan Wen* 山瘟 (Mountain Plague, 2001), *Chuzou de Leyuan* 出走的樂園 (Paradise of Leaving, 2005), *Jian Xie* 簡寫 (Simplified Writing, 2009), *Ye Pusa* 野菩薩 (Wild Buddha, 2013) and others. In 2010, Li published her debut novel *Gaobie de Niandai* 告別的年代 (The Era of Farewell), about 15 years after she first emerged as a

fiction writer. In the afterword to this novel, Li reveals her anxiety over the rationale for, and process of writing a full-length novel.

何以我那麼處心積慮要寫一部長篇？為甚麼？……關於這小說的完成，而今思之我仍然感到「不寒而慄」。過程中兩度經歷了美尼爾綜合症（以眩暈為主要症狀的內耳病，伴隨耳鳴與噁心嘔吐等狀況）復發，固然讓這作品分外有點嘔心瀝血的味道，而在這慣用催化技倆而急於收穫成果的時代，對於一個工餘寫作的寫手而言，它挑戰我的決心，考驗我的毅力，淬煉我的意志、自律與自信。（805;808）

Why do I deliberately want to write a full-length novel? Why?...Thinking about the completion of this novel, I am still feeling “terrified”. During the process, I experienced two relapses of the Meniere’s syndrome (a disease affecting the membranous labyrinth of the ear, following by symptoms of tinnitus, nausea and vomiting). It somewhat brings a particular element of the painstaking to the writing of this novel. In this age that is accustomed to catalyzed tactics and rushed reaping, the writing of this novel—for an amateur writer like me—challenges my determination, examines my perseverance, refines my will, discipline and confidence. (805;808)

In the age of the internet, when novels are not so well-received compared to short stories and micro-fiction—which Li apparently has more confidence in—her desire to write a full-length novel is worth pondering over. In response to Li’s anxiety, Hong Kong writer Dung Kai-cheung 董啟章 (Dong Qizhang), who is known for the thickness of his novels, seeks to make sense of the marginality of writing full-length novels. He believes that it is precisely through this seemingly “untimely” act of writing full-length novels in the era of consumerism, that the

writers manage to contend with social media and the online world, even though they already know that this action is doomed to failure (Dung 307-10). He further argues illuminatingly that

作為小說家，我們的工作就是以小說對抗匱乏，拒絕遺忘，建造持久而且具意義的世界。在文學類型中，長篇小說最接近一種世界模式。我們唯有利用長篇小說的形式，去抗衡或延緩世界的變質和分解，去阻止價值的消耗和偷換，去確認世界上還存在真實的事物，或事物還具備真實的存在，或世界還具備讓事物存在的真實性。(820)

As a fiction writer, our job is to confront the deficiency, refuse to forget and construct a lasting and meaningful world. In the genre of literature, full-length novels are closest thing to a mode of the universe. We can only resort to the form of full-length novels to contend with or delay the deterioration and decomposition of the universe, to prevent the values from being consumed or substituted, to confirm that there is still authentic existence in the universe, or at least still things that possess authentic existence, or that the universe is still provided with authenticity that allows things to exist. (820)

In other words, Li's debut novel positions itself in the era of consumerism, seeking a way to bear the weight of history. It is an attempt to question deficiencies in mainstream historical narratives, and to supplement it with fictionalized accounts. Particularly in *The Era of Farewell* (henceforth TEF), a metafictional story that uses the May 13 incident as its backdrop, Li is seemingly ambitious in constructing a grand narrative (a "big book"). This is the recurrent motif that the text keeps repeating—it keeps saying that the author of TEF is

writing a “big book”. However, throughout the novel, we understand that there is more than one TEF being written by different characters. This metafictional technique confuses the reader with the portrayal of different realities and imaginaries, all of which convey the structure of domination and marginality affecting Malaysian society.

This section will first look at the employment of literary devices in the work. It argues that Li uses metafiction, or more precisely “historiographic metafiction” in Linda Hutcheon’s formulation, to invite readers to self-consciously reflect upon the fictional potentialities of a “post”-1969 history in Malaysia. Although Li offers what appears to be a revisionist account of May 13, I argue that her way of reading history is complicit with official historiography, and this is despite her intention to “bid farewell” to it. In addition, I propose a gendered critique of Li’s metafiction. A focus on gender facilitates my investigation of Li’s employment of feminist elements to question the prevailing patriarchal logic underpinning the writing of national history. Regardless of her good intentions, however, Li’s narrative attempt to “liberate” her female protagonist arguably works in tandem with the logic of commoditization underwriting international capitalism. She seems to be optimistic that emancipation can be secured through economic power, and makes no inquiries into the state-led economic modernity discourse that is prevalent in the post-1969 era. Thus, these elements make TEF incapable of delivering a “farewell narrative”

which, if successful, would offer a powerful counterdiscourse to state-led narratives.

The novel TEF starts at page 513 instead of 1, which symbolizes that contemporary Malaysian history starts with the significant May 13 incident. It lays out three layers of narrative. Each layer is seemingly independent, but is in fact tightly entangled and with the other. While most novels are written in third-person or first-person voice, however, TEF is written in second person voice, with the reader addressed as “you”. In the first layer, the protagonist, “you” read a novel titled *The Era of Farewell* (henceforth TEF-2), a “big book” that “you” obtained from the oldest library in town. It is a book that, according to “your” mother, might be written by “your” father whom “you” have never known. “You” are a prostitute’s son who stays in the Mayflower hotel with “your” mother who passed away at the beginning of TEF. The novel that “you” have been reading constructs a second layer of narrative—the story of Du Li An 杜麗安, a ticket seller at the movie theater in town who is attacked by a mad man on May 13, 1969 and is rescued by Gang Bo 鋼波, the head of gangsters. Du Li An later breaks up with her lover Ye Lian Sheng 葉連生—a high school teacher who is an activist in an opposition party during the 1969 General Elections—and agrees to be Gang Bo’s second wife. At the beginning of TEF-2, Du Li An is reading a novel titled *The Era of Farewell* (henceforth TEF-3)—the only novel that she has ever read in her life. TEF-3, the third layer of narrative, is most possibly written by a female

writer called Shao Zi 韶子, and it is one of the few works that she published using that pseudonym. As we later find out, Shao Zi might be the avatar of a street vendor named Du Li An who died of heart failure at the age of 35. The third layer of narrative forms the second half of TEF-2, one that “you” are reading, but Shao Zi’s stories are narrated by a critic Di Si Ren 第四人(The Fourth, or the fourth person) who has been madly engaged in researching Shao Zi’s works throughout his life. In other words, what “you” have been reading in TEF-2 is The Fourth’s narration of and critique of Shaozi, but “you” have never read Shaozi’s works. “Your” knowledge about Shao Zi depends completely on The Fourth’s judgement, and, as we know, “you” have found him to be an unreliable narrator.

The complicated, complex plot forces readers to read cautiously, in case we lose any information. Before going further, it is useful for us to know how “you”, the protagonist, finds TEF-2 in the library:

這書沒有扉頁。你有點不相信自己的眼睛，於是翻來覆去地找。可它真的沒有，甚至也沒有版權頁，沒有書名頁；既沒有標明出版者，也找不到作者的姓名。更奇怪的是它的頁碼居然從 513 開始，似乎這書的第一頁其實是小說的第 513 頁……這是你在圖書館裡找到的一本書。它像磚頭一樣厚重，被擱在圖書館某犄角的書架上。那書架緊挨著「歷史／傳記」類書籍的專櫃，上面標明的類別是「其他」……收藏「其他」類書籍的書架，被置於圖書館盡處最僻靜的一個小房間。小房間是破舊書籍的收容所，裡面也放置了不少多年來乏人問津的藏書，而放在「其他」類架子上的書本並不多。你手上這一本《告別的年代》被放在最底層，而且是最靠牆的一本，彷彿停放在時光的深處。蜘蛛在那上面一代一代地交媾，繁衍和死去...(523-6)

The book has no front page. You somehow do not believe your eyes, so you look over again and again. But it really hasn't, it even has neither a copyright page, nor a title page. It does not state the publisher, nor the writer's name. Even more strange is that the page starts at page 513, it seems that the first page of the book is in fact page 513 of the novel... This is a book you find in the library. It is thick like a brick, being put at the corner of a book shelf. The book shelf is adjacent to the shelf of "History/Memoirs", but its categorization indicates "Others"... The shelf that collects all "other" books is located at a small room in the most secluded end of the library. The small room is a shelter for the worn books, it is placed with many collections that people have little interest in. Yet there are not many books on the "Others" shelf. The book *The Era of Farewell* that you are holding at hand is put at the bottommost level against the wall, and it seems to be placed at the deepest period of time. Spiders copulate, breed and die at there, generations by generations...(523-6)

This book TEF-2 is an "other" book—a book that is hard to be categorized. Comparing it to the TEF that we are reading right now, Li Zishu suggests that TEF is also one that is marginal, amorphous, unpopular and difficult to categorize. It can be likened to the category of "History/Biography" yet is not quite there. Looking at it from this perspective, Li is self-consciously blurring the definition and categorization of her novel, for she not only fictionalizes History, but also fictionalizes fiction (through Shao Zi's story). For her, the genre of "fiction" can itself be further problematized. Her metafictional articulations are grounded on a fundamental opposition, on an effort to "create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction", as famously defined by Patricia Waugh (6). In addition, she not only breaks the barrier between creation

of and criticism of fiction, but also connects them with the interpretation of History.

The novel itself fits Linda Hutcheon's definition of "historiographic metafiction" operating in the postmodern condition, as it strives to subvert the historical knowledge that is transmitted semiotically (Hutcheon 122). Hutcheon's concept seeks to break the myth that postmodernist metafiction is ahistorical and apolitical. As we can see in Li's various works, she adopts a metafictional device but also creates dialogue with the past. In addition to that, the using of footnotes in TEF/TEF-2 is arguably an invention of "paratextual conventions of historiography" which seeks to "both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations" (123). In other words, Li expresses her dissatisfaction over the singular narrative of History. She tries to probe into the collective history of Chinese Malaysians by using her fictions to reflect upon historical events that had huge impact on Chinese Malaysians, such as the history of the Malayan communists, and also the May 13 incident.

As noted by Malaysian critic Lim Choon Bee, however, Li's adaptation of historical elements in her previous short stories shows a lack of "emphatic understanding" of history (Lim 180). Lim quotes the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, and asks: "What happens to *verstehen* (understanding) when *empathy* (empathy) disappears?" She further calls into question Li Zishu's sincerity and understanding of histories when she fictionalizes them (180). Lim's critique

focuses on Li's "unreflexive" narration of the history of the Malayan Communists. As one of the few writers who managed to interview the late Chin Peng in southern Thailand when she was a journalist, Lim assumes that Li should have a more emphatic understanding of them. Nevertheless, Lim finds that while Li applies her excellent writing skills to elucidate part of the history of Malayan Communism, she is still in effect complicit with official historiography, which suppresses alternative histories and memories.

Ng Kim Chew, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Lim is too harsh on Li Zishu. He believes that fiction is not historical interpretation, and stories (instead of histories) are what fiction writers have more interest in. For this reason, stories are bound to have multiple elements, or can even be contradictory, and they should not be seen as working in binary opposition with official historiography (Ng "Mahua Nüxing Wenxue" 5). As a fiction writer and critic himself, Ng Kim Chew's standpoint is clear—fiction should not be restricted in forms and contents, and should not be appropriated to any "politically correct" option. His adaptation of "historiographic metafiction" is another interesting phenomenon that will be further examined in Chapter Four.

Lim and Ng's oppositional viewpoints raise a large question—the relationship between ethics and fiction writing. Certainly, this profound philosophical question cannot be answered in this limited chapter. However, the notion of "literary citizenship" that I have proposed in Chapter One might be a useful method to look at the politics of literary ethics. For one thing, writers who

attain the right to speak through a published piece of fiction arguably enter the public sphere, in which they attain what I call literary citizenship²⁶. Narrative power henceforth lies in the hands of the fiction writer whose works will be read and critiqued by civil society. In that sense, writers should be cautious about how they use the power they acquire, especially when they use metafictional technique that refuse closure of interpretation. Otherwise they might unconsciously abuse the power of the pen. As Donna Palmateer Pennee argues in her study of the Canadian writer Timothy Findley whose works she calls “moral metafiction”, such works are not merely “fiction ‘about’ fiction, not merely the construction of discourses and the texture of the past and present”, but should also be “driven by a moral imperative to articulate counterdiscourses” (Pennee 19). Otherwise, such works might work in the service of oppressive ideological formations. Bearing that in mind, it is doubtful whether Li Zishu’s attempt to question the official historiography of 513 is successful. Looking back at TEF, we might say that it is an ambitious novel that seems to offer a revisionist account, or a counterdiscourses to official “May 13” , but that doesn’t quite get there.

Unreflexive counterdiscourse as post-1969 conundrum

²⁶ For the definition of literary citizenship, please see Chapter One.

513 is the starting page of the novel, and 513 marks a turning point in Du Li An's life. However, descriptions of the actual historical incident itself are rare in the novel. We can only find a statement imposed on the protagonist "you" by the narrator.

做為土生土長的本地人，你雖然年輕，卻也略懂 513 這數字可能蘊含的含意與暗示。那年國家大選，一向執政的**國陣聯盟**失去了三分之二議席的優勢。五月十三日那天反對黨在都城遊行慶祝，沒想到引起暴亂、失火和流血。政府宣布緊急狀態，在全國實施戒嚴四天。(527; bold added)

As a local, although you are young, you somewhat know the possible meaning and insinuation of the number 513. In the general election that year, the ruling **Barisan Nasional** coalition lost its two thirds majority in parliamentary seats. On May 13, the opposition parties marched to celebrate victory in the capital, ended up causing riots, fires and bloodshed. The government declared a state of emergency, martial law was imposed in the entire nation for four days. (527, bold added)

As can be seen, the above paragraph in effect concurs with the official perspective on May 13. Subsequently, many revisionist accounts, such as the one in Kua Kia Soong's book, have been published to subvert the one-sided official statement. However, Li Zishu seems to have no intention of making reference to them. Another important thing to note is the inaccurate term used in the indented paragraph—"Barisan Nasional"(國陣). This coalition is the incumbent ruling party, but it was formed only in 1973, after the May 13 incident. Its predecessor was the Alliance 聯盟—the ruling coalition led by Tunku Abdul Rahman since

the 1955 General Elections, which took place before the declaration of independence. As we know, the Alliance met an unprecedented loss in the 1969 General Elections, and it was after the May 13 riot that National Operational Council took hold of the country until 1971. Later, the Barisan Nasional coalition was formed in place of the Alliance, joined by some opposition parties from the previous election. It won majority seats in the 1974 General Election and has ruled the country till today. In brief, Barisan Nasional is a much bigger coalition than the Alliance, and was formed during a turbulent period characterised by a “state of exception”.

Li Zishu’s inaccurate use of the term in the novel is not coincidence, yet it is also not by intention. By making this judgement, I mean that Li, like many Malaysians, unconsciously takes for granted the long-term dictatorship of the ruling party as a continual power, without recognizing that the ruptures caused by the power shift in 1969. This power shift deserves to be seriously taken into account, as suggested by Kua Kia Soong, for Malaysia had shifted from the leadership of the old aristocratic power to the new state capitalist class. To put it simply, the post-1969 political situation is shaped by the radical state capitalist class which disguised its domination with the clamour of *Bumiputraisim*. However, Li Zishu arguably makes no intellectual inquiries into historicizing the structural problem of the May 13 incident and its aftermath, and only sees state power as an integrated whole amenable to a continuous (patriarchal) structure.

At this stage, Lim Choon Bee's critique seems to resonate with my argument. In TEF, "May 13" may be symbolically employed as a technique to "perform" historical consciousness. However, without a more in-depth investigation of History, such "performance" will eventually only serve as a backdrop with no profound meaning. This is not to suggest that Li should write long novels covering major "historical" events. Instead, in fiction, the historical is projected in the stories of everyday experience and speech, and it acts as a site of reflection. It is through "the everyday", as the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot puts it, that "inapparent" and "unconcealed part of existence" is revealed. They may seem insignificant, but will always point to "the hither side of what signifies it" (Blanchot 242). That is to say, "the everyday" escapes our attention, yet it is the trivialities it carries that produce effects on our historical conceptions. From the everyday narratives that Li Zishu is committed to showcasing, we find that History becomes "performative"—it is merely a representation of official history and offers no further investigation or revision. The novel's ambitious desire to "bid farewell" to certain old values or attitudes or events does not appear to succeed on its own terms. In view of this, we have to ask—what is Li trying to bid farewell to?

As we explore further into the multi-layered narrative, it is obvious that the story of Du Li An moves in tandem with the dominant, state capitalist class's attempt to impose its logic on the post-1969 situation. Furthermore, although Li tries to criticise Du's materialistic turn after marrying Gang Bo, she seems to

ultimately support this “liberation” attained through the achievement of financial independence. In this way, Du arguably becomes subordinate to (patriarchal) state capitalism. In the prime of her life, Du Li An breaks up with poverty-stricken Ye Lian Sheng after Gang Bo rescues her on May 13, 1969. Ye Lian Sheng, who supports an opposition leftist group, is detained on the day of riot. After his release, Du Li An is already engaged to Gang Bo; she will be his second wife. We can easily see that after May 13, Du abandons her old life, with its associations with leftist and revolutionary struggle, and turns to the protection offered by physical force and economic capital. Although both critical and emphatic readings of Li’s ideology in this part of the novel are possible, I would argue that Du’s agency stems from this quest for economic and sexual capital.

In the economic boom of 1970s and 80s Malaysia, Gang Bo’s household has gained wealth from the earnings of the Chinese secret society Jiande Tang 建德堂. They possess the first colour television in the neighborhood, and Du Li An and her step-daughter Liu Lian 劉蓮 often rent video tapes of some popular Hong Kong drama series. Soon, Du Li An, who used to be a diffident housewife, takes the opportunity to buy a restaurant, and then a terraced house, before Gang Bo is abjectly expelled from the gang. It is then that she starts an affair with Liu Lian’s lover Ye Wang Sheng 葉望生, who happens to be her old lover Ye Lian Sheng’s twin brother. Wang Sheng, unlike Lian Sheng, is a dissolute womanizer

and money-grubber. Du Li An pays him for their sexual relationship. The portrayal of this strong and independent woman highlights the commodification of sexual and power desire. That is to say, Du's subject formation relies on the workings of modern capitalism, one that also helps Du achieve sexual fulfilment. Her quest for commodities arguably dramatizes the confinement of subjectivity in the post-1969 situation, which chases economic modernity. Yet, Li Zishu's tone here is not sardonic. It is opportunistic, for she arguably sees Du's "growth" as a liberalizing path. Since then, Du manages to stand on her own two feet. The novel emphasizes the fulfilment of Du, economically and sexually, but does not investigate their limitations. That is to say, the portrayal of Du Li An is arguably a feminist endeavour on the part of Li Zishu, but eventually her character is confined by the patriarchal logic of capitalist narrative.

When Du Li An unexpectedly comes across Ye Lian Sheng in 1989, she has been secretly seeing his brother Ye Wang Sheng for some time. Soon afterwards, Du Li An takes the initiative to leave Ye Wang Sheng. She gives him a bundle of money after their last sexual tryst in an old hotel in town, the Mayflower, which is also the hotel that "you" have been living in with "your" mother. She finally recognizes that it is Lian Sheng that she can not forget, not Wang Sheng.

那一晚以後，杜麗安再見到葉望生，竟然沒了以前那沸騰的愛與欲求。事實上，她已經有好長一段日子沒想起他了。年底時大家各忙

各的，即便偶有念想，她也清楚知道在那些模糊畫面中出現的人並不是他，而是他的弟弟蓮生。蓮生已經與他的同伴們有說有笑地走了，沒有回頭，也不揮別。(737)

After that night, when Du Li An sees Ye Wang Sheng again, she does not have the love and desire as before. In fact, it has been such a long time that she does not even think about him. At the end of year they are busy on their own, even if sometimes she thinks about him, she is clear that it is not him in her vague picture, but his brother Lian Sheng. Lian Sheng has left, laughing and talking with his companions, he did not look back, and never said goodbye. (737)

The above may be seen as an embodiment of the alienation felt by Du, especially since it takes place in 1989, the year that sees the collapse of the global Cold War structure. Her days with Lian Sheng are long gone. Her pursuit of material goals over the last 20 years has made it impossible for her to connect with her previous life. However, this self-reflective moment is short. After bidding farewell to Lian Sheng, and then Wang Sheng, Du Li An soon adopts one of Liu Lian's twins. Wang Sheng, the father of the twins, has long since run away with his company's public funds and doesn't know about Liu Lian's pregnancy. Significantly, Liu Lian's son becomes Du Li An's next source of fulfilment in life. Du helps Liu Lian to find a place to give birth secretly. She helps Liu Lian deal with her premarital pregnancy. In exchange, she gets Wang Sheng's son. Again, she uses money to fulfil her wish. Even though she sympathises with Liu Lian's plight, she still keeps a safe distance from her, just as she does with her other female friends. This is Du Li An's strategy for survival in a patriarchal society—she refuses to

build solidarity with other women. She observes them from a distance in a manner akin to men gazing at women.

The stories of TEF and TEF-2 continue from generation to generation, and the plots that Li lays out seem to repeat themselves again and again. As we can see from the perspective of a reader of TEF, “you” also have a twin brother whose name is J. And, like Lian Sheng and Wang Sheng, you both know about each other’s existence but never live together like brothers. We can easily link the characters of the two layers of narrative, for “you” and J are Liu Lian and Wang Sheng’s children, Du Li An is “your” adopted mother, and the TEF-2 that “you” have been reading is not written by “your” father (as implied by “your” mother), but by Shao Zi, the avatar of Du Li An. That makes “your” mother the writer and manipulator of all of these narratives. However, this circulative linking is a trap that leads nowhere, and it will not help with our understanding of what exactly Li Zishu means when she tries to write a “farewell narrative” as her book title suggests. Likewise, many of Li’s other characters are trapped in circles, engaged in endless searches. They wander around the old town Ipoh, peep into the lust-filled environs of the Mayflower hotel, and look for fathers who are absent.

As shown above, Li Zishu’s “farewell narrative” in TEF is arguably a failed attempt to tackle the official narrative of May 13. In the process, she tries to offer a feminist perspective to supplement the absence of women’s voices in patriarchal histories and literatures, but her project does not succeed. In another formulation, she tries to embody local knowledge in Sinophone language. For

example, the names Du Li An and Liu Lian obviously refer to the king of fruits in Malaysia—the Durian. Du Li An is the Malay pronunciation of Durian, while Liu Lian is the Chinese word for Durian. However, it seems far-fetched to argue that the character Du Li An is an embodiment of Malay natives who became economically well off in the post-1969 era, while Liu Lian symbolizes a timid Chinese girl living a miserable life. The politics of language here reveal Li Zishu's intention to provide “local color”, or, in the Chinese way of saying, *nanyang fengwei* (南洋風味, tropical flavour). As mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter, Li Zishu wants to infuse a “local voice” into contemporary Sinophone Malaysian literature as the latter has been heavily influenced by Taiwanese literature and Mainland Chinese literature. She tries to create permeable boundaries through the use of a creolized Sinophone language, for example, through her insertion of Cantonese dialect and Malay language terms into her fiction, and also through reference to Hong Kong dramas, and Thai transsexual prostitute. She also uses indigenized Chinese characters (such as the Durian expression here). Yet, the cultural politics that govern the “localizing” process does not appear to have taken into serious consideration the dangers of commoditization and exoticism.

As can be seen, Li's efforts to create a fictional account of traumatic events that weigh heavily on many Chinese Malaysians are praiseworthy. In the process, she problematizes the dominant discourse of history through the form of metafiction that rejects a single narrative. However, Li arguably makes no

intellectual inquiries into the History that she tries to subvert, and ends up working in tandem with the logic of state capitalism, turning History into a “performative” backdrop—a mere representation of official history with no critical examination. At the same time, her critique unconsciously falls into the trap set by patriarchal nationalism. In my opinion, if Li sets out to write a story *about* May 13, as her book title and her use of 513 symbolism suggest, she needs to adopt a macroscopic, reflexive perspective, to probe further into official narratives and state-ideology. In her narrative, it seems that the conundrum of 1969 remains unresolved. The official interpretation of the incident itself is unchallenged, and her feminist critique is arguably complicit with the state’s post-1969 move towards international capitalism. These features formulate an inability to bid farewell to the mentioned era, and follows the trend of much post-1969 writing—a recourse to “light literature” that skirts difficult issues and problems.

In the next section, I analyse another novel about the May 13 incident written by a young Anglophone writer Preeta Samarasan. I will look at how she turns the metaphor of May 13 into a powerful tool for gender and class criticism, and how she seeks to reclaim history and language at the grassroots level.

Preeta Samarasan and the Falling Apart of the “Big House”

The narrative and counter-narrative of the May 13 racial riot has been focused on the situation between the Malays and the Chinese. However, the

Indians in Malaysia, despite being listed amongst the three main races in Malaysia in the official propaganda of multiculturalism, remain underrepresented in the national arena²⁷. Constituting around 8% of the population, most of the Indians in Malaysians were originally from Southern India and were brought in by the British colonizers as cheap labour force during the 19th century in large scale migration. The South Indian labourers were preferred because they were “malleable”, “worked well under supervision”, and were “easily manageable”. More importantly, they were “most amenable to the comparatively lowly paid and rather regimented life of estates and government departments” (Sandhu 56).

Under the British communalist policy, many of the Indians were enclosed in the rubber estates when Malaya was known for being the biggest rubber producer in the world. Like the Chinese, some of the middle class had the chance to attend government English schools and worked as professionals in colonial public services. However, this socioeconomic and class divisions in each ethnic group have often been neglected. The post-1969 *bumiputra* policies, which aimed at eradicating economic imbalances among different ethnic groups, turned out to be the key factor that deepened ethnic segregation. For example, until today, the ex-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who has been the main promoter of

²⁷ Apparently, the indigenous community in Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia have been ignored for a long time.

bumiputra rights, still argues stereotypically that the Chinese are all wealthy merchants, and the Indians are lawyers and doctors (Zurairi n.p.).

Preeta Samarasan, an Anglophone writer born and raised in Malaysia and who eventually moved to the United States, directs her dissatisfactions against the racially driven economic policy in her debut novel *Evening is the Whole Day*. Like Li Zishu's TEF, the novel is set against the May 13 racial riot and focuses the narrative through a non-*Bumiputra* perspective. Both of the novels are set in Ipoh, the out-of-the-scene site of the May 13 riot. In Li's novel, it is the post-1969 Chinese community and Sinophone writings that she is concerned about, and for Samarasan it is the Indian society that is falling apart through class division that draws her attention. Though not as ambitious as Li Zishu who wants to write a "big book" about May 13, Samarasan points out in an interview that the purpose of fiction is to "tell the big story through small stories" (Stameshkin n.p.). And her small stories lie in the family members of the "Big House" — the Rajasekharan household.

In this section, I will first look at the interdependent form of history and fiction in *Evening is the Whole Day* and focus on how Samarasan delineates the Indian community in Malaysia in terms of their pursuit of nationhood and belonging, especially in the situation of post-1969. It is through the story of Appa and Amma that we see Samarasan's critique of patriarchal nationalism and residual colonialism, and how, through the character of the servant girl Chellam, Samarasan seeks to give a voice to voiceless class struggles. Following that, I will

probe into the politics of language that Samarasan adopts to localize English language as a mode of cultural resistance, as well as to reclaim the national language as one owned by the people.

The May 13 racial riot is often referred to as the “Sino-Malay riot”, as it seems that Malays and the Chinese contested for power in the political and economic spheres, but not Indians. Samarasan’s novel exposes the fissures that Indian Malaysians are positioned between, for they have been forgotten by dominant narratives even though they also bore witness to and experienced the post-1969 atrocities. For this reason, Samarasan uses the character of Appa—Lawyer Rajasekharan, to move the story beyond the question of Sino-Malay rivalry. In the story, Appa, a spirited lawyer of Indian descent from an upper middle class family, participated in the 1969 elections, working for an opposition party. In an argument between Appa and Amma, Samarasan shows us the bipolar identity that diasporic Indians in Malaysia hold on to.

“The problem with their racial politics,” he began, “is that— ”

“Aiyo, all this politics all I don’t know lah,” she said. “Whatever they want to do as long as they leave us alone it’s okay isn’t it?”

“Leave us alone? *Leave us alone?* You call this leaving us alone? Their bloody Article 153 and their ketuanan Melayu, yes yes I know you’ll insist you can’t understand a word of Malay, so let me explain it to you, let me tell you what it means: it means Malays are the masters of this land, do you understand? Our *masters!* With that **kind** of language—”

“Tsk, after all it’s their country, what, so why shouldn’t they be the masters? Just because you cannot sit at home and keep quiet means—”

“But it’s our country just as much as the bloody Malays’! Do you realize some of our families have been here longer than theirs? Ask the Straits Chinese—”

“Tsk, all these grand ideas...” (Samarasan 99; italics original; bold added)

Appa is politically active during the 1969 election, as he sees it as a strategy to resist Malay supremacy and as a way for Indians to be recognized as proper citizens. His education and training as a lawyer and his upper middle class background allow him to participate in the civil movements. Nevertheless, Samarasan also leaves room for a critique of Appa’s political ideology. This is because Appa did not question the fact that the British were also the “masters” of Malaya, and that his reason to reject *Ketuanan Melayu* is because of the use of “that kind of language”. For an English-educated lawyer like Appa, who benefited from the colonial education, Malay is not qualified to take over the position of English as a national language. Obviously, the passing of the National Language Act in 1967 has directly impacted English-educated professionals like Appa. The politics of language in the novel will be examined in the later part of this section. Compared to Appa, Amma, who is from the lower middle class, resists any participation in the political realm and is well aware of her inability to assimilate into society. She doesn’t question Malay privilege and is scornful of Appa’s “grand ideas”. Moreover, she never bothers to learn Malay even though

she is born in Malaya. In the political upheaval of the 1960s, Appa wishes to educate Amma, so that she can understand “how the nation’s fate would affect her, Lawyer Rajasekharan’s wife, even sitting at home doing nothing, gadding about town eating curry puffs, even so, yes indeed—” (99). Ironically, in this regard, we learn later that Amma is more embroiled in the May 13 events than anyone else.

Even though Amma is heavily pregnant with Suresh, their second child, she insists on moving to Kuala Lumpur temporarily to take care of her sister Valli, who has just given birth. She takes five-year-old Uma—the eldest daughter of the family—with her. At one point during the journey, Uma almost outwits the uneducated Amma. One can well imagine what happens next. Amma enters into labour at the height of the riots, but her taxi is besieged by the violence taking place outside. The fact that Samarasan makes Amma the witness of the riots positions us to view the incident through the eyes of the Indian community, which is helpless like Amma in the besieged car. Suresh, we learn, is born in the taxi. He is connected with the idea “of dreams sent up in flames and ideals abandoned in dirty back alleys” (133). Appa, in turn, is overwhelmed emotionally by the riots despite the victory secured by his party. He would later give up his political activities and turn to apply a job as a public prosecutor. Looking back at the nationalist sentiments that he once had, he now moans that his grandfather “should’ve stayed far, far away from the bloody boat that brought [him] here...In India I would’ve had a real chance” (135).

Here Samarasan not only showcases the political bankruptcy of Appa as a nationalist, she also insinuates the moral bankruptcy of the desperate Appa in his later life. We see this not only in his career, where he unjustly prosecutes a poor Malay worker Shamsuddin for being the mastermind behind Angela Lim's murder, but also in his personal life, where he has an affair with a Chinese lady and ends up having three children with her. What is more, he physically molests Uma, his own daughter, one night at her room when she is sixteen. Samarasan exposes the corruption of Appa since the 1969 election, but she does not blame it on the event itself. Instead, she points out that the social injustice that patriarchal nationalism does to a society is replicated at the household level. Furthermore, Appa's incestuous assault on Uma also suggests a self-enclosed endogamy that results from the ethnic and religious communalism of post-1969 Malaysia (Erwin 203). Samarasan seems to argue that, besides the authoritative national narrative, ethnic enclosure also occurs at a personal level.

Samarasan's sustained critique on the patriarchal system also explores the latter's exploitation of gender, race and class, and its linkage to colonialism and capitalism. As the Marxist feminist Teresa Ebert puts it, patriarchy is

[a] regime of exploitation that produces gender difference in order to construct asymmetrical, unequal divisions of labor, accumulation, and access to social, economic, and cultural resources, guaranteeing not only the privilege of one gender (male) over the other (female) but, more important, the subjugation and exploitation of the "other" gender as the very grounds of wealth

and accumulation. In other words, patriarchy is a historically diverse, ongoing, and unequal system of gender differences and exploitation: one that is “necessary” to the very existence and prosperity of the majority of socioeconomic systems in the world and is fundamental to the global expansion and colonization of capitalism. (Ebert 20)

As can be seen, Ebert shows that patriarchy defines mechanisms of power historically and socioeconomically. Women’s subordination is seen as necessary for the public’s good in the language of economic modernity. If we can recall Li Zishu’s story, Du Li An’s successful wealth gaining is also based on this logic of subordination. Intriguingly, by portraying Amma’s difficult birth at the height of the riot, Samarasan again responds to the difficult problems that patriarchal nationalism brings upon the nation. She juxtaposes the patriarchal bloodline of the Rajasekharan family here to showcase the three-generational male characters’ ambiguous positions of their lives in the different periods of Malay(si)an history. At the same time, she highlights the story of Amma who gives birth to a new “nation” at a crucial time.

Tata, the first locally born child of the Rajasekharan family, buys the “Big House” from its British owner Mr. McDougall who leaves Malaya before independence. On 31st of August, 1957, Independence Day, Tata moves into the Big House. Symbolically, he put his index finger on the switch, and “there was Light...” (25). At this moment, he echoes the iconic national scene of Tunku Abdul Rahman shouting “*Merdeka*” (independent) on a colonial cricket ground

in Kuala Lumpur, declaring the birth of the country. Tata is hopeful about the birth of the new nation, he tells his son Raju (Appa) that: "It's our country, not the white man's...Just work hard and the world could belong to you here" (18). Compared to what Appa thinks after the riot, however, Tata's hopes have turned out to be in vain. Here, Samarasan seems to remind us that, despite the "Light" that Tata sees in his new house, it is still a colonial product. The spectre of residual colonial ideology haunts the Big House from generation to generation, and it continues to strike the youngest member of the family — Aasha, who keeps seeing the ghost of Mr. McDougall's illegitimate daughter in the house. In addition to that, Samarasan also hints that the discourse of May 13 in effect colludes with colonialism. Residual colonialist thinking is manifested through the incident:

[E]very man, Chinese, Indian, and Malay, forgot his contempt for the views of the departed British and savored the taste of his old master's stereotypes. *Coolie*, they hissed. *Village idiot fed on sambal petai. Slit-eyed pig eater*. They'd been given a vocabulary, and now, like all star pupils, they were putting it to use. (121; emphasis original)

Here we can sense that Samarasan attempts to point out that May 13 discourse is articulated in colonial language. In this regard, she further suggests that in order to understand the implications of history, one can not overlook its implicit link with the colonizers. Perhaps this is the reason why the novel is written in a

non-chronological order using an amorphous temporal structure. It challenges our understanding of history in unilinear articulations, and further demands that we look backwards and forwards. Despite the fact that May 13 incident happened 12 years after independence, it is still demonstrated in the logic of colonial capitalist thought due to the inadequate, unreflexive decolonialization process in the nation. By staging the implicit links between colonialism, patriarchal nationalism and post-1969 state capitalism, Samarasan provides us with a lens to closely investigate the May 13 events critically, instead of buying into official accounts.

In order to further problematize the issue, and also to focus on the question of causality, she invents the story of “Rumor and Fact” as a way to interpret the dissemination of May 13 discourse. She writes: “Rumor in a red dress, Fact in coat and tails, and together they began a salacious tango in the streets” (120). Eloquently, the dance of Rumor and Fact in the city intermingles with the real events that are happening. Samarasan refuses a too-direct suggestion of the cause and effect of the event, but instead sees it as a combination of “rumor and fact”. In addition to the depiction of the riot scene, she gives the story of Chellam—the maidservant in the Big House—and the case of Angela Lim’s murder that Appa prosecutes. The two strands of story are embedded within May 13 discourse, and draws our attention to the parallels between them. On the one hand, the novel starts with—and ends with—Chellam’s expulsion from the “Big House” and Uma’s departure to the United

States for further studies. Throughout the story, we know that Chellam is wrongfully accused of causing Paati's—Appa's mother—death. In fact, Paati is pushed by Uma. On the other hand, the working class Shamsuddin bin Yusof, a *Bumiputra*, is prosecuted by Appa as the murderer of Chinese schoolgirl Angela Lim. Yet, it is known to us that “the jury and the judge are on someone's secret payroll. They agreed on Shamsuddin's guilt before...the trial began” (169). Apparently, Shamsuddin is framed by someone from the upper class.

The framing of Chellam and Shamsuddin works towards elaborating on the ramifications of “Rumor and Fact”, in which the power of rumours has invented another strand of reality that interferes with our understanding of what really happened. In other words, the degree of truth is covered up by the reproduction of rumours. The information or knowledge that we receive has already been appropriated by the dissemination of rumours. Here, Samarasan singles Appa out as the bringer of injustice, for he has not only abandoned his socialist ideals after 1969, but also ironically executes his aim through violent means. At the moment of conviction, he abuses the power of a prosecutor to convict voiceless victims such as Chellam and Shamsuddin. In this regard, Samarasan reminds us that oppressors and oppressed are interchangeable things. She further highlights the class struggle submerged in the name of racial politics.

“Class” Submerged by Rhetoric of Race

As noted by Lee Erwin, *Evening is the Whole Day* is concerned with class struggles persistently, “and it is *this* product of colonialism, acceded to by the post-independent state but mystified by discourses of ‘race’, that haunts the narrative” (Erwin 209; emphasis original). In other words, racialised national history has often colluded with the logic of colonial capitalist thought and comes at the expense of class struggles. In this regard, Shamsuddin represents a vulnerable figure in socioeconomic terms, despite the fact that he is supposed to be a beneficiary of the *bumiputra* regime. Samarasan reiterates her dissatisfaction over the social violence disguised in racialized narrative, which has exploited real marginalized groups. Clearly, Chellam is the main victim in the entire narrative for she is unable to speak for herself. She has no capital—Appa has been giving her monthly salary to her drunkard father. She cannot proclaim her innocence over Paati’s death. An “estate girl” from a working class family, Chellam is forced to enter urban space, living with a middle-class Indian Malaysian family who despise her from the first moment. Intriguingly, Samarasan opens the novel with the title “The Ignominious Departure of Chellamservant Daughter-of-Muniandy”, and ends it with “The Glorious Ascent of Uma the Oldest-Eldest”. In the first scene, Chellam, who has been dragging the shabby suitcase out of the Big House, is asked to leave the family after being accused of causing Paati’s death, while Uma is packing her beautiful suitcase with piles of clothes and souvenirs for the next stage of her life at Columbia

University in New York. At the end of novel, Uma leaves for New York and Chellam returns to her estate house and commits suicide one year later.

Chellam, as the key figure of the novel, wanders helplessly in terms of class, gender and race. In the post-1969 situation, ethnic minorities such as Indians and Chinese face much political and economic challenge, and Appa's household is positioned within this power struggle. Nevertheless, at the same time, the existence of an "estate girl" like Chellam in the novel unsettles the prevalent narrative as she represents the multiply-marginalized human being in terms of race, gender and class. In this regard, Samarasan not only calls attention to race and gender issues, but also points out to class divisions within society, and especially within the racialised and gendered narratives that dominate the country. The silencing of class struggles in the neo-liberalist logic of identity politics also shows how the Cold War aftermath impacts the post-1969 era. As Dashini Jeyathurai puts it, Chellam is "encapsulated within that geographical, occupational, racial, and gendered epithet", and her being culturally labelled as the "rubber estate girl" symbolizes "a desire to distance middle-class Malaysian-Indians from these bodies that represent the economic space that is the estate" (Jeyathurai 312). In other words, the body of Chellam is rejected by society and she unfortunately becomes the scapegoat caught by the manifold power struggles. For Samarasan, this phenomenon importantly brings out the theme of her novel, as she suggests in the postscript: "[T]he deepest wounds are buried far under the surface. Things happen and then disappear entirely from view,

never spoken of but nevertheless sharing and controlling our lives” (Samarasan “The Deepest Wounds” 13).

Reclaiming language

In order to deal with the healing of wounds, Samarasan’s omniscient narrator uses a tone of wild sardonic humour to offset the tragic lives of the characters. And this strategy can be seen as a form of resistance to the dominant discourse of official historiography, as well as to suggest a feeling of empathy toward all characters. In doing so, she adopts a subverted and reappropriated form of the Anglophone language—one that is creolized in the locality. It is noteworthy that local language terms in the novel are not singled out in italics or in capitalized forms. For instance the Tamil word “thanggachi” (little sister), the Chinese word “char kuay teow” (a kind of food), the Malay expression of “karipap” (curry puff), together with numerous other examples, are all internalized naturally in the novel. This multilingual practice can be seen as a counterforce to the monolingual paradigm. It manifests what Yasemin Yildiz calls the “postmonolingual condition”, in which the language and ethnicity can be “delinked” (Yildiz 17). In other words, Samarasan’s use of creolized forms of English is an effort to recognize multilingual realities in Malaysia, without succumbing to the lure of exoticisation and unreflexive multiculturalism—for it is naturally articulated without italics or capitalization. And this is an effort to

resist the logic of language allegiance that is celebrated openly at the state level — such as the ideology contained in the 1967 National Language Act.

Paradoxically, this process of language production cannot ignore the implicit colonial link embedded in English. Hence, Samarasan does not only seek solution to the problems created and defined by the dominant power. Instead, she arguably changes the definition of language identity *per se*. By changing the definition of language identity, I mean that Samarasan uses her own terms to define a grassroots language identity, one that is equal and nonhierachical. She refuses to fit in with the state-sanctioned language and ethnic identity as delineated in the National Language Policy or the National Cultural Policy, but unsettles it at the grassroots level. One important sequence in which she puts this notion into practice is in the delineation of Appa's affair with a Chinese lady.

As we know, Appa was born with a missing sense of smell. But the first time he meets this char kuay teow lady at her food stall, he can suddenly smell.

“[Y]es, his nostrils were coming alive, sighing, swooning, singing, the hairs in them doing a joyous dance, cilia rousing themselves as though from a witch's spell, synapses that had lain idle since whatever mysterious, forgotten childhood injury knocked them out now pooping like Chinese New Year firecrackers. And what he smelled was the char kuay teow lady's breath, sharp and salty, like other people's descriptions of the sea”. (Samarasan 278)

The amplifying descriptions of Appa's first experience of smell show Appa's excitement and affection for this ordinary Chinese lady. The narrator later tell us

that, “Appa had never been one to believe in love before he met his char kuay teow lady”, and soon they would start a “fairytale romance” (278). Together Appa and his Chinese mistress bear three Chindian children, all of whom call him “Pa”. What is even more surprising is that Appa and his mistress speak Malay to each other—“a language that displayed neither one’s sharp wit to full effect” (280). If we can still recall in the dialogue between Appa and Amma quoted above, Appa used to hate the language for its “kind”.

The significance of Appa’s affair with the Chinese lady is that it showcases an uneasy picture of hybridity. However, this hybridity is not the kind of hybridity celebrated by some postcolonial studies scholars. It is one that is felt awfully and distressedly. Appa’s Chindian children are the products of this hybridity, and “they’ll always be bastards” as their mother puts it (281). The children will grow up speaking Malay—a language that they and their parents do not own, a language that does not manifest their cultural identity, a language that will not guarantee them a *bumiputra* status but will push them beyond the margins of the country’s dominant racialised narratives. Here we can see Samarasan’s effort to break through the logic of national language identity, for she redefines Malay as a grassroots language that minority groups can use to communicate with each other, just as Appa uses Malay with his Chinese mistress. Appa’s Chindian children will have the right to access the national language, and to possess it as their own. As a whole, she attempts to “delink” language and ethnicity, and to claim Malay as the language of every Malaysian, as one that is

equal and nonhierachical. This is her important contribution. She offers a counterdiscourse to the post-1969 state ideology, and reclaims language to manifests a “post”-1969 structure of the feelings within the heart of every Malaysian. It is an eager feeling of getting away from the dominant narrative that suprematises one race and one language.

Nonetheless, as a member of the Indian minority community, Samarasan is less hopeful about the possibility of social integration when compared to predecessor Indian writers such as K.S. Maniam, even though she tries to break ethnic and language barriers in her fiction. Therefore, it is no surprise that in the end of the novel Uma will finally leave for the US to seek a “better” future. Appa tells his Chindian children that, in America “you can go there broken, and tomorrow find yourself whole” (339). Though ironically written, this final sentence of the novel still projects the writer’s despair about impenetrable racial politics in Malaysia. Uma’s departure is an emotional breaking away from her past, her family and her guilt (towards Chellam), and this would be done through her adoption of a diasporic subjectivity. However, as we can imagine, for a broken character like Uma and also for other characters in the novel, it is impossible to bid farewell to trauma and wound merely through a physical departure.

Summary: May 13 Revisited

The Era of Farewell and *Evening is the Whole Day* are the writers' endeavours to portray the post-1969 structures of feeling embedded in the country's racialised historiography. As writers born in the 1970s, Chinese writer Li Zishu and Indian writer Preeta Samarasan live under the spectre of May 13. Both respond to the incident, describing it as an event that breaks apart the entire society. They then attempt to offer an alternative story to supplement official historiography. In so doing, Li uses metafictional tactics to subvert what is real and what imaginary, while Samarasan sets up a microscopic lens on an omniscient narrator who articulates herself through an amorphous temporal structure. Nevertheless, their approach of revisiting May 13 is relatively different. Li adapts the narrative of a "big book" which, in her opinion, can bear the "heaviness" of this period of history. Yet, her strategy arguably lacks a genuine critique of history writing *per se*. This results in a replication of state narrative and failure to launch a counterdiscourse. In contrast, Samarasan strives to tell History through "small stories" enclosed in the "Big House". Throughout the stories, she demands that we look at class divisions. She also demands that we recognize gender and ethnic minority within the society. Moreover, she delinks race and language and offers a grassroots "encounter" using local language terms. She also celebrates multilingual realities in Malaysia life. Both writers advocate a public discussion of May 13 so that we can probe into the structural development of history. Doing so allows us to understand the language of

trauma, to lift the veil on silence and suffering, and finally, to bid a real farewell to May 13.

Chapter Three: Cold War and the Postcolonial Gothic

Beth Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury* and Chang Kuei-hsing's *Elephants*

Gothic fiction sprang up in eighteenth century Britain during the transition between the Enlightenment and Romantic period. Its depiction of horror and romance provided a voice against the legacies of rationality in the Enlightenment, as canonical texts like *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Dracula* (1897) celebrated the notion of the uncanny, the irrational, the outlawed, desires and passions. In this regard, recent scholars find it complicit with the explorations of postcolonial ideas. In postcolonial contexts, the binary oppositions of East/West, coloured/white, civilized/savage, superior/inferior are discussed widely. Yet, at the same time, these binaries are also limited as I will show below. By showing the process of "Othering", postcolonial discourses call into question narratives and modes of presentation that reinforce colonial and imperial ideology. Such criticisms challenge the dominant notion of the Western modular form of rationality and modernity. Clearly, the malleable connection between the Gothic and postcolonialism may generate a broadening of critical parameters. In this way, postcolonial Gothic illuminates the function of power/knowledge in literature through a socio-historical lens.

This chapter argues that the study of the postcolonial Gothic has to be expanded to a broader range of vision and include critiques on all forms of imperialist knowledge, rather than only using the "colonizers-versus-colonized"

binarism to frame the past. It thus considers the works of two postcolonial writers in Malaysia, Anglophone writer Beth Yahp and Sinophone writer Chang Kuei-hsing, who address various power struggles in colonial Malaya and Borneo in their novels. Although their works are undoubtedly “postcolonial” in their portrayal of colonial legacies, I argue that their works employ a more critical lens on the Cold War structure of power involving Malaysia and Borneo. In doing so, they not only connect Gothic elements to postcolonial discourse, but also place a spotlight on the oft-overlooked Cold War legacies that are generated by neo-colonial power/knowledge. Taiwanese cultural critic Chen Kuan-hsing’s argues that the three forces of nationalist thinking—colonialism, the Cold War structure and the imperialist imaginary—have become interwoven in one historical process. Thus, the combined movements for “decolonization”, “deimperialization” and “de-Cold War” should be carried out to confront the cultural legacies of the Cold War (Chen, *Asia as Method* x). Yahp and Chang’s works aptly provide insight toward understanding the three interwoven forces.

Gothic, Postcolonialism, and the Cold War

The concept of postcolonial Gothic draws on a wide variety of texts that are studied under postcolonial literatures. Even though the Gothic has always “maintained an intimacy with colonial issues”, there is an ambivalence, according to Smith and Hughes, that connects the postcolonial and the Gothic. The reason is that, in Gothic fiction, the

[l]abeling of otherness is often employed in the service of supporting, rather than questioning, the status quo. This is perhaps the central complexity of the form because it debates the existence of otherness and alterity, often in order to demonize such otherness. (Smith and Hughes 3).

In other words, by creating a character that is Other, often in broken, demonized, or haunting images and forms, Gothic fiction arguably supports the “Othering” process, a process that postcolonial critics oppose. As such, Smith and Hughes urge readers to use “poststructuralist skepticism” as a mode of enquiry, in order to “open up the political dimension” of gothic writing by addressing their fundamental complexities (3-4). That is to say, when applying Gothic criticism onto postcolonial texts, the images of Other can be further overturned and transformed. The boundaries of power relationships can thus be uncovered and then, hopefully, corrupted.

In another endeavour to define postcolonial Gothic” or Gothic postcolonialism, Hughes and Smith, in a special issue of *Gothic Studies* , argue that the Gothic “is, and has always been, *post-colonial*” (Hughes and Smith 1; emphasis original). In other words, Gothic elements in postcolonial texts proclaim “the basic contesting powers –intellectual, physical, spiritual –that are all too easily lost behind the specificities of Empire writing, both fictional and theoretical” (2). In this regard, postcolonial Gothic fiction opens up rich and mobile discussions in different areas in terms of their colonial impact. They

examine different aspects and situations pertaining to power struggle — whether in “political, geographical, sectarian, cultural or military” spheres — in which the power struggles are “frequently conducted at a personal level” (2). It is through the delineation of individuals in fiction that the power struggles of the colonizer and colonized are addressed.

In addition, Singapore-based literary critic Philip Holden argues that the postcolonial Gothic does not simply represent binary relationships between empires and people. He also criticizes the fundamental binarism between “colonialism and the colonized” in postcolonial discourse, denouncing this problematic, critical framework for lacking of “historical specificity” (Holden “The ‘postcolonial Gothic’” 355). For Holden, such binary criticism overlooks the “contradictions of the present” and, particularly, the appeal of “nationalism” in terms of the tension between “affective and rationalizing elements” (353). In other words, if one confines the interpretation of haunted images in postcolonial Gothic fiction to simply being a reference to colonialism, one restricts the broad potentiality that Gothic fiction can bring. Holden goes on to argue that

the study of postcolonial Gothic requires a commitment to **historicism** in order to understand the specific purchase of Gothic tropes... Fiction, and especially the Gothic, has the potential to excavate and explore anxieties attendant on nationalism, and in the transition from colonial subjecthood to national citizenship, and indeed to explore **ongoing exclusions and internal colonialism** after independence. (Holden “The ‘postcolonial Gothic’” 353-6, emphasis added)

Holden insists that it is required for readers of postcolonial Gothic texts to maintain a sense of historicity in the local context. This is because the relationship between power/knowledge surface in many layers in the texts, explicitly or implicitly, and are not just limited to the binary representation of the “colonizer and the colonized”. From another perspective, Singaporean cultural scholar Chua Beng Huat argues that Southeast Asian scholars tend not to reflect critically on the history of colonialism and its effects, but are rather kept occupied in analysing the pre-independent nationalist movement and post-independent failed democracy projects, or the rise of authoritarian regimes and multiracial politics (Chua “Southeast Asia” 232-3). For Chua, this deficiency is shaped because of the attention put on the Cold War and the ongoing political instabilities (233). He thinks that the war between communists and anti-communists was “essentially a civil war” but has been “re-inscribed as ‘communist insurgency’”, and the colonial regimes were part of these armed conflicts “in the making of the new nations that emerged from colonialism” (232). As a result, the anticolonial efforts that regard colonialism as oppressive have been “displaced” by the fear of “totalitarian oppression” of communism, and the colonizers have even been seen as “benefactor[s]” who helped modernize the new nations (232).

Thus, the arguments of the two aforementioned Singapore-based scholars are at least two-pronged. First, it is the Cold War that has hijacked attention away

from necessary reflectings upon the history of colonialism and its effects in Southeast Asia; second, reflections on colonialism should not be bound by the “colonizer and the colonized” binarism as it will overlook other important historical problems, for instance, in the case of Malaya, the communist war. In other words, reflection on colonialism must be generated, and it should expand to encompass a broader range of issues that involve a more critical inspection of specific historical, socio-political events. In the case of Malaysia, I argue, the Cold War crisis has hindered and diverted scholars’ attention from inspecting these problems of colonialism. During this period, colonial power and state nationalists collaborated hand in hand to strike against communism, which was originally anti-imperialist.

From then on, communism in Malaysia became a “myth”. Precisely because this subject is taboo, young generations who have never experienced the revolutionary era are more eager to discover hidden aspects of its history. On examining the resurgent interests in the Malayan Left in independent documentaries directed by some prominent young Malay directors, cultural critic Khoo Gaik Cheng comments that these films

seek a way to connect Malaysians’ past and present, they try to provide continuity between two temporal spaces that seem fragmented by two completely different ideologies and struggles...[They are] attempts to connect the political past and the apolitical present. (Khoo G.C. “Filling” 261-2)

To put it differently, younger generations, who have been taught in schools about the “insurgencies” in history, are now demanding the right to unearth hidden historical facts about the communists. Similarly, for writers and artists, knowledge production is their means for filling gaps in history and questioning state-led ideologies.

As a result, in this chapter, I propose a historicized analysis of the two novels—Beth Yahp’s *The Crocodile Fury* (1992) and Chang Kuei-hsing’s *Elephants* (2006)—to illustrate the historical colonial/imperial presence emanating from Malaysian cultural scenes. I read the texts with a particular emphasis on the residues of the Cold War. Their works respond to the failures of national politics and communist struggles, and seek to deconstruct the haunted aspect of history. Bearing Holden and Chua’s claims in mind, the chapter seeks to excavate imaginaries and anxieties dominating the transitional period “from colonial subjecthood to national citizenship” (Holden 356). My chapter further explores the post-independent period in which ongoing internal imperialist thinking still exists, especially with the help of the Cold War. It argues that postcolonial Gothic writers formulate a dystopic representation of the idealist national allegorical romance in order to deconstruct an imperium-moulded “common fear”. Such questioning of the construction of a common fear can generate new patterns of thoughts in the historical landscape, which has long been shaped by the authority’s demonized accounts. The demonization of communists by colonial regimes and state power has successfully suppressed the people’s urge to

examine the poignant history of colonization. Yet, fiction supplements these deficiencies, and, by employing Gothic tropes, fiction writers are able to showcase dislocations and contradictions in their society. It can further overturn and transform the repressed Gothic Other into certain kinds of power.

As for the Gothic setting, Yahp and Chang both situate their texts against a jungle backdrop. They cleverly make use of the wilderness of the jungle to uncover romance and hidden histories. The jungle is the site where the communists fought wars with anti-communists troops during the period of Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) till the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1989. Therefore, the depiction of a confined space, as in the jungle, shows the writers' intention to open up repressed and marginalized histories that are not included in the grand narratives of national history. By adopting a Gothic lens to amplify the stories of the Other in the jungle, such as the non-human and ab-human figures like ghosts, human-turned-crocodiles, elephants and so on, Yahp and Chang arguably confront the historical common fear directly in order to "challenge the dominant humanist discourse" of colonialism and the "Enlightenment notion of rationality" (Smith and Hughes 2).

Beth Yahp, on one hand, employs a multi-layered, non-chronological text in order to challenge reductive versions of story and history. She uses Chinese/Malaysian folk tales and supernatural beliefs to excavate the repressed history of Malayan communists in the jungle. In doing that, she employs the metaphor of the "third eye" — a Chinese belief that it is the eye that has the ability

to see ghosts—to provide insight into alternative readings of history. Also, Yahp juxtaposes the images of the crocodile and the communist leader to stage the “crocodile fury” as a form of rebellion against violent imperialist powers. By layering alternative views and fragmented stories of the “crocodile” and its fury, Yahp arguably showcases a multifaceted narrative of history. This narrative places a spotlight on repressed and marginalized power struggles in history. Chang Kuei-hsing, on the other hand, enforces a double resistance towards the British imperial powers as well as the neo-colonialist conspiracy headed by the postcolonial authority. He positions the story in Sarawak, Borneo—a state that gained independence in July 22, 1963 from British colonialism but was forcibly put into the newly-established nation-state Malaysia on September 16, 1963. Chang describes the ambiguous position that the Sarawakians faced during this period. He stages the hunter-and-prey tug-of-war in the Borneo jungle during the Cold War, making critical enquiry into the haunting invasion of imperial modernization and capitalist projects. The latter two dominating powers have thus far remained unchallenged at the expense of stigmatization of the communists.

In what follows, I will analyse the creative intervention that Beth and Chang provide. I will show how they use a Gothic lens to make prominent their concerns about colonial legacy and the residues of the Cold War.

A Tale of the Jungle: Beth Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury*

Beth Yahp was born in Johor Bahru in 1964 and went to Sydney at the age of twenty. An award-winning writer, she now teaches creating writing at the University of Sydney. *The Crocodile Fury* (henceforth *Crocodile*) was published in 1992 and has been translated into several languages. It won Yahp the New South Wales Ethnic Affairs Commission Award and the Victorian Premier's Prize for First Fiction. The story is set in a convent school near a jungle, up on a hill named "Mat Salleh"—a nickname given to the Caucasians in Malaysia—where a rich man's house was once built on. Though no specific spatio-temporal background is revealed, it is not difficult to infer that the story takes place in British colonial Malaya in the 1940s or the 1950s when the communist jungle war was at its fiercest.

In this section, I will look at Yahp's focus on the jungle as a symbolized space of power, in which all the tension of power struggles take place. Following that, I examine how Yahp uses the Chinese supernatural belief of the "third eye" to uncover the haunted aspect of history in (post)colonial Malaya, which offers an alternative reading to history. Later, I will analyse the symbol of the crocodile that Yahp uses to portray the myth of the "common fear", and show how she uses the Kafkaesque metamorphosis of a "lizard boy" into a crocodile as a means to highlight the Othering process that takes place. In my opinion, Yahp juxtaposes the image of a crocodile that runs amok with the character of a communist leader in order to highlight Gothic rebellion against imperialist powers.

The story of *Crocodile* is compiled by fragmented non-chronological narrations of the protagonist “I”, who is a girl facing puberty. In her storytelling, she reveals stories and rumours about her Grandmother (she is referred to in capitalized form), her mother and her encounters in the convent school. The convent school she attends is also where her mother works as a school keeper, where the girl spends her everyday life with many extraordinary encounters. The story begins with the girl’s description of the convent and the jungle:

That’s the place to begin. The convent on the hill where I spend most of my days and some of my nights was famous long before I was sent there. Once, before the nuns took over, it was only one building, a shambles, a mansion abandoned for years by everyone except the jungle...Once it was the headquarters of bandits. Then, the headquarters of soldiers, where informers sidled for their monthly pay-outs, and the screams of bandits, communists and other enemies of the city echoed through the halls. Once, long before that, a rich man lived there, in the mansion that later became the convent library, the ghosthouse, and when he lived there it was filled with exotic treasure. (Yahp 4)

As can be seen, the convent—a colonial product and space—is a site taken over by various regimes of power in different periods of time. It is shown as a haunted place near a jungle, which inherits a heavy burden of history. First it belongs to a rich man who is surrounded by luxurious furniture and countless servants (including Grandmother). Then, it is a hideout for the communists (or the bandits as they are called) before it is taken over by the “soldiers” (most probably British

soldiers). It is where the British receive villagers who sell information about the communists to them. During that time, villagers often hear the screaming of “bandits, communists and other enemies of the city” who are most probably being tortured or killed. Finally, it becomes the land where the convent school sits—a colonial construction that the British colonizers left behind. We can trace the historical movements of Malaya through the depiction of the land changing-hands—from the arrival of British colonizers in the Malaya, to the “insurgent” activities of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), the British-led anti-communist movements, the attainment of independence, and, finally, to the remains of the convent school. The convent school on the Mat Salleh Hill and its surrounding jungle is the place where all the stories take place.

The jungle as the setting of the story is an important backdrop throughout the novel. Yahp transforms the spatial history of the jungle during the Cold War into a site of power resistance. As we know, jungle warfare constitutes the most significant part of Cold War history in Malaya. After the declaration of Emergency in June 1948, the MCP was listed as an illegal organization and a jungle guerrilla war was staged between the Commonwealth armed forces and the MCP. During that time, jungle was a vital space where battles took place. In the Chinese community, people usually referred to those who “walk into the jungle” as communists who left home to fight a guerrilla war against British colonizers and the later ruling state capitalist class. Throughout the time, the communist war in the mythical jungle is conceived as an unspeakable past and

ghostly tale, one that is haunted by the shadow of the Cold War. Moreover, due to the teaching of national history and the emergence of capitalist urbanization projects in Malaysia since independence, people's imagination of the jungle and the communists are often associated with the anachronistic, untimely and outdated. Thus, Yahp's focalization on the jungle constructs a space of rebellion and resistance, where the protagonist girl digs into the earth to uncover her past, her previous life cycle and the history of her father — a communist leader.

The jungle is a symbolized space of isolation and constraint that showcases anti-imperialist struggles on one hand, yet also magnifies the national myth of creating anti-communist propaganda on the other. Thus, Yahp situates the story in the jungle as a space of power resistance, where she employs Gothic elements to explore the tension underlying various power struggles. In so doing, she resurfaces the unspoken and hidden fears that run beneath the grand narratives of nation building in official historiography. In doing so, she uses Gothic narratives that involve the return of the repressed, as well as the mentioned metamorphosis of the crocodile to react to the irrational, absurd aspects of Malayan history during the Cold War.

Seeing Through the Third Eye: Return of the Repressed

My grandmother knows about ghosts. She is an expert on ghostly sightings, on the habits and hungers

of spirits and demons, on ghostly vengeance or favour reaching to spook humans from the other side—The Crocodile Fury, p28.

The young girl's Grandmother is a famous ghostchaser in town. Her "third eye" is suddenly opened at the age of 14 when she works as a servant in the rich man's house on Mat Salleh hill. Since then, she has been "the enemy of havoc" and the "enemy of newcomers and people who disregard rules" (55). To have an extra eye means to be able to see what others do not see. According to Chinese folklore, when a third eye is opened, one is able to see supernatural objects, such as spirits and ghosts, and is also able to predict the previous and afterlife. By using this privilege, Grandmother survives with her ghostchasing skills, and she is feared by the people in town. However, grandmother has an enemy and that "keeps her sitting in her special chair by the doorway late into the night, plotting and planning a way to make the old enemy pay: a way to win" (55). The ghost of this enemy has been haunting her since her third eye is opened.

To grapple with the haunted, ghostly figure, Grandmother makes careful plans in her life in order to "capture" the ghost. These plans include adopting the girl's mother, who is pregnant, to be her disciple in order to make the girl and her mother fulfil her wishes. In fact, Grandmother's enemy is the rich man's lover, Lily, who is named after a flower that makes people forget their troubles (145). The rich man's lover is a lonely soul "from the sea" who is trapped in the rich mansion. She refuses the rich man's touch. Eventually, she is put into a

punishment room to prevent her from leaving the rich man's mansion. Although her body is trapped, the soul continues to wander even after she passes away in the punishment room. The reason she tails Grandmother is arguably to possess a new body, a new life for her rebirth. Hence, the portrayal of the lover being held captive by the rich man showcases the repressed local that has been held hostage by colonial power. Her body is trapped, but her soul wanders.

When Grandmother works at the rich man's mansion during the colonial period, the rich man gives her complete freedom on the condition that she gives her "body and soul" to him (51). The rich man is an embodiment of colonial power who is to be "humoured, worshipped and obeyed" under iron rules (221; 108). Grandmother believes that complete freedom means an exchange with "belonging, body and soul" and she gives the rich man all of that (52). During this time, whenever she walks on the floor, her footprints "[are] flanked by other lighter feet, hop marks, slide marks, the skid marks of sudden leaping" (53). The fact is that Grandmother is being followed by the deceased rich man's lover, whose trailing smudges make Grandmother feel as though an unbearable darkness is coming to her. At exactly this moment in the story, Grandmother's third eye is opened. From this instant she knows her first life cycle is coming to an end.

Soon after Grandmother's third eye is opened, she departs from the rich man's house as a young woman to live in the city as a ghostchaser. She also provides services for people who want cures, or for those who want to cast evil

on their enemies. However, during her stay in the city, she is occasionally awakened with “her feet twitching, her toes curled into claws”, and then she will go up the hill, walking back to the rich man’s house only to find the once-luxurious mansion standing like an empty ghosthouse (201-2). It seems that although her body is in the city, her soul remains trapped in the haunted house. That is to say, her ghostchaser life is an afterlife of her young self in her first life cycle, and Grandmother actually “died” on the day her third eye is opened. In other words, Yahp links Grandmother’s previous life with the lover’s. She insinuates the return of the repressed (the lover) who “strikes back” at the postcolonial situation. Grandmother, being granted the privilege of having a third eye, has to excavate and unearth her previous life who was given “body and soul” to the colonizers.

Malaysian critic Andrew Ng has suggested that the portrayal of Asian Gothic in literature often shows the “redemptive capacities” of the Gothic elements. It depicts how the personal relationship ties “do not cease with death, but continue in different dynamics into the afterlife” (Ng A.H.S “Asian Gothic” 6). In other words, Asian Gothic is formulated on the concept of the return of the repressed that ask for debt payments in the afterlife. Bearing that in mind, Grandmother seems to be the lover’s debtor in her previous life, and the return of the lover is to ask for debt payments from Grandmother. However, her return is not to take revenge, but “to seek remembrance and reparation” so as to free herself from “ancestral and historical debts” (“Asian Gothic” 7). She wants to be

recognized and to be freed from the colonial powers. Nevertheless, Grandmother's debts will circulate life after life unless they are paid off, or else they will eventually pass on to the girl in the next generation. Such circulation resembles the repetitive and episodic nature of history.

To discover the historical junctures and undercurrents in the national, dominant history, Yahp portrays the "in-between" border-crossing moment of the life cycles of the girl, her friend the bully and Grandmother. The moment signifies the crossing between an important gap in life cycles or in history. Each character has tasks to fulfil before they can proceed to the next stage of life. For example, the girl at 14, is "no longer a child, not yet a young woman, at the in-between time given to general bouts of dizziness and reeling" (11), meets the bully at the convent school who stops growing up at the age of 14. Grandmother's "third eye" is opened when she is 14, from then on she is destined to be a ghostchaser and is doomed to face her ghostly enemy directly. Yahp cleverly highlights the border-crossing moment in the characters' life cycle to insinuate the birth of a new identity, one that is to be dovetailed between the past and the future.

We follow the girl's growth in the bildungsroman through her experiences in the transitional moments in her life. Yahp uses these moments to provide critiques of colonial oppression. She delineates the journey of members of the new generation, such as the girl, in their search for a "rupture" in history. In a way, British colonialism has subjected the colonized Other to a ghostly

subservient position, and that is why the return of the repressed local (the lover) will continue haunting postcolonial society. In this regard, the Gothic is embodied through the exemplification of the lover. Furthermore, Grandmother's third eye is the tool to excavate the haunted pasts, restoring local knowledge such as her Chinese traditional knowledge or superstitions. She asks the girl to note down all the taboos and beliefs so that one day, when the girl's book is published, people will believe her.

Another noteworthy Gothic formulation in *Crocodile*, other than the critique of colonial oppression as figured through the image of the lover, is the metamorphosis of the Crocodile. Similar to the haunting return of the lover, the fury of the Crocodile is cast as a rebellion against colonial and neo-colonial legacies. For neo-colonial power, I mean the multi-faceted authoritative powers that provoke the formation of a Malaysian identity during the postcolonial period. In what follows, I will showcase the myths of constructing a "common fear" in Malaysia. I argue that Yahp's descriptions of the crocodile seek to deconstruct that fear, filling in the void in history of leftist struggles in the national narratives. The colonial power that wins over the "body and soul" of Grandmother and many local inhabitants, has transformed into a neo-colonial strategy during the Cold War period, one which involves the battle for "hearts and minds".

The Myths of the Common Fear: Filling and Crossing the Gaps in History

Most of the articles that discuss *Crocodile*²⁸ adopt a colonizer-versus-colonized binary that Holden, as mentioned above, disagrees with. These articles see the Gothic narratives of the uncanny and the monstrous as a form of resistance to the suppressed colonial past. Although such a critical framework is useful in analysing postcolonial texts, Yahp's *Crocodile* arguably features a much more specific conceptual framework that endeavours to reveal what Holden sees as "ongoing exclusions and internal colonialism after independence" (Holden "The 'postcolonial Gothic'" 355). This is because critics do not use a historicized approach in order to get a historical and structural view of the power struggles that take place in the specified period, one that is shrouded by the shadow of the Cold War. In this regard, the Gothic elements that Yahp employs are not merely directed against colonial structure, but are also a means to challenge the successful anti-communist propaganda implanted by both colonizers *and* the state ruling class. These two forces of authority have demonized the leftists and have since erased over a critical period.

One important metaphor of Gothicism in Yahp's novel is the metamorphosis of the Crocodile. Yet it is not much discussed by critics and has not been connected with the Cold War situation. In my opinion, the crocodile not

²⁸ See, for example, Shanthini Pillai's "Occidental Echoes: Beth Yahp's Ambivalent Malaya" *Hecate* 33(1): 2007, 174-189; Grace Chin's "Angry Ghosts: The Furious Power of the Marginalized Other in Beth Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury*" *Outskirts Online Journal* 4: May 1999; Grace Chin's "Reading the Postcolonial Allegory in Beth Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury*: Censored Subjects, Ambivalent Spaces, and Transformative Bodies" *Nebula* 6(1):2009; Gina Wisker's "Showers of Stars: South East Asia Women's Postcolonial Gothic" *Gothic Studies* 5(2):2003,64-80.

only embodies anti-imperialist desires, but also breaks the myth of the “common fear” constructed by anti-communist propaganda. Thus, the irrational metamorphosis of the lizard boy into a crocodile, who runs amok at the end of the novel, symbolizes resistance to the “humanist” colonial governmentality, and also points to a “new” generation and new dreams conceived by leftist struggles. As we will discover later, the girl is the child of the lizard-turned-crocodile, and her father would go into the jungle and become a “King Crocodile” to lead all the “bandits” in the jungle war.

To deconstruct the common fear that is propagated by colonial government and the state ruling class before and after independence, Yahp does not enforce a single reading of the crocodile. Instead, she layers into the story different perspectives, enabling alternative views to fragment the crocodile’s story into bits and pieces. This is arguably a way to break through dominant narratives. In one formulation of the crocodile story, we are told that the name “Mat Salleh Hill” was changed to “Kill Crocodile Hill”. It is probably during the short-lived “Malayan Spring” soon after Japan’s surrender in 1945, and before British’s ignominious return, that “bandits planned and staged brilliant guerrilla raids and ambushes, capturing supplies of food and weaponry, communications networks, prisoners and trucks” (102). They are the “bandits” who proclaimed *“Freedom!...Self-determination. Independence. Say no to slavery! Local riches for the locals. Act now!”* in leaflets distributed among the locals (103).

In another formulation, the convent nuns' version of the crocodile says that the crocodile is the enemy of convent girls and it should be kept away from them. Good convent girls should be afraid of the crocodile or they will run wild. The nuns tell the convent girls that the only wish the crocodile has is to "plant baby crocodiles inside a girl so she will grow and grow, and...get bigger and bigger, and one day she will burst!"(187). They keep reminding the girl that the crocodile is a figure to be ashamed of and feared – a "public enemy" who does all kinds of evil things. In other words, these images of the crocodile throughout the story echo the representation of the Malayan communists in state-led propaganda. They are the versions that are told to the next generations. Nevertheless, this common fear remains a myth that the girl wants to investigate.

She learns from her only friend in school, who is called the bully, that "the crocodile is a creature whose belly is always full" and whose "eyes are always tearful, not from crying but from gulping, from swallowing everything whole" (106-7). The girl then learns about the crocodile from her mother. Her mother is the only witness to the "birth of the crocodile" on the day when the Lizard Boy was transformed. Her mother tells her that the crocodile is "not an evil menacing creature, but one whose luck is very bad" like herself (162). And the crocodile's power "lies in the fury of its birth", which erupts on the day he runs amok (125). On that day, the convent girls frighteningly see the Lizard Boy go crazy and turn into a crocodile.

It took the caretaker, three teachers and two of the biggest, strongest nuns to catch the Lizard Boy. He ran with the speed of rabbits, dodged with his pursuers with the agility of a fine young monkey and when finally cornered, turned to attack with the ferocity of a captured tiger. The Lizard Boy kicked and punched at the arms that grabbed at him, he pushed furiously at the bodies that sat on him to keep him still (127).

In this episode, the grotesque, absurd process of the metamorphosis of a crocodile is carefully recounted. The Lizard boy transforms into a monster that no one can take hold of. He strikes everyone in his outburst of fury. After this Kafkaesque transformation, the Lizard-turned-Crocodile is forcefully placed in the laundry room where the mother works. Days after the transformation, the crocodile stays unmoving and silent beside the laundry wall. One day, he cries in grief and the tears reach the mother's skin—sincere “crocodile's tears”. Finally, almost stunningly, “[t]heir bad luck bloods [smear] and [mix]” (166). The connection of two “badlucks” gives birth to the girl. At the time of her narration, the girl has just reached 14, lying in-between the childhood and adulthood—a moment of boundary crossing.

The girl has been collecting the stories of the crocodile—who is apparently her father and who later goes into the jungle to become the King crocodile that leads all the “bandits”. As can be seen, the fury of the crocodile is the anger of the oppressed constrained by an imperial construction (the convent). And the Crocodile arguably represents the Malayan Left which is often viewed as the violent, insane Other in history. The girl's father could “be the leader of his

country” if the revolution succeeds, yet he has to carry a historical burden for generations without proper recognition (106). Yahp’s narration of the Gothic is staged in the centre of the mythical jungle—a backdrop that Chang Kuei-hsing’s fiction shares. She has singled out Cold War history as a symbol that haunts unilateral, dominant national history. She endeavours to redefine the boundaries of power/knowledge covered by historical “undercurrents”, and she calls into question the legacy of colonial capitalist power and the inherited postcolonial state power.

As such, the Gothic portrayal of the metamorphosis of the crocodile with regards to the chaos it causes arguably symbolises a subversive rejection of the “Enlightenment notion of rationality” (Smith and Hughes 2). The story reveals the tension and anxieties of social change in the decolonization movements on the one hand, and it also alludes to the cultural identity formation of contemporary Malaysians who are constantly shaped by the colonial and Cold War past on the other. It singles out the leftist struggle as an important episode of history that is unrecognized by dominant narratives.

Following the clues from the crocodile’s stories that they heard from others, the girl and the bully walk into the jungle to “keep a lookout for the crocodile” (38). In the end of the story, the girl finally has a voice of her own, as she provides her own version of the crocodile:

The crocodile and I have wrapped our arms around each other, his short arms hardly reaching around me...We have slashed through jungle cobwebs with his sharp crocodile's knife, pierced jungle fruit to assuage our hunger and thirst...He'll shrug his shoulders against the shadowy weight of all the hinted-at secrets and half-told stories that pattern the years; against the patterned fixity of the years. That's why the crocodile's back is bowed. Sometimes he carries this weight for generations...The croc doesn't burn up the past, he sifts through it like treasure. (323-4)

As can be seen, she unites with her father—the crocodile—who runs away in pursuit of his dream in the jungle. Their laughter wakes up the birds and small animals in the jungle. When the crocodile fury again hits, “there is a wild urge to run” to the next stage of history (325). As the girl digs even deeper into the jungle earth, she touches the lover's gown that is hidden by the crocodile. This is the “unfinished business” that Grandmother wants her to burn up. Yet she finds that the crocodile does not “burn up the past” as the past is a treasure to be cherished.

I'm still laughing as I tug at the ribbons fastening my too-tight braid. I ease Grandmother's leaf and root collection bag from around my waist, dig into its folds for the never-fail matches and ghostburning candles she makes me carry wherever I go. I have another plan for Grandmother's unfinished business, other than burning it up...I slide Grandmother's strongest amulet out from under my tongue, toss it into the grave where perhaps a lily will grow. I lift my skirt to piss on it for good measure. This spot: the end of my second life cycle. The beginning of the next cycle, where the lover's footprints have left my feet and are pointing. (327-8)

The in-betweenness of her childhood and adolescence has passed. The girl finds a way to give birth to a new identity after reuniting with her father and reconciling with the lover. The connection to the past, the unearthing of the trapped lover and the touch of the jungle earth turns the girl into a woman who finally has a voice of her own. She eventually turns into a “scaly”, “bloating”, ridged-with-spikes crocodile (329). At that very moment, she reunites with the father crocodile *and* the lover who both symbolize the historical past and the previous life. In other words, together they are able to move on to recognize their future incarnations via reconciliation with the past.

In this regard, it seems that only when one recovers and connects with one's past and future, that one can move on to a new identity. Similarly, in the context of Malaysia, the anti-imperialist efforts of the Malayan Left have to be acknowledged as significant parts of the birth of the nation. It is not possible to understand Malaysian history if we skip this important page, as national, dominant narratives try to do. Beth Yahp, in response to this situation, represents the Othering process of constructing a “common fear” in her story. Through this, she fills in the historical ruptures caused by the Cold War. In doing so, she dismantles a one-sided historical narration by offering discontinued and fragmented layers of story. She calls into question the creditability of a unilateral, univocal national narrative. The different layers of story suggest a circulative life cycle, like the girl's, in which every single part is integral and importantly indispensable. Accordingly, Yahp allows the girl to pick up bits and pieces of her

historical pasts and dovetail them with the construction of a new identity in the next cycle of her life. Each episode thus symbolizes an irreplaceable part of the girl's life experiences.

As a whole, Beth Yahp successfully empowers the marginalized Other to emerge by allowing them to speak in their own voices. It is either the lover's calling or the crocodile's fury that enables us to probe into the psyche of the Other who have been Gothicized by the dominant narratives. In doing that, she employs the metaphor of the "third eye" to read the repressed history of the colonized through a Gothic aesthetical lens. At the same time, she juxtaposes the images of the crocodile and the communist leader to stage the "crocodile fury" as rebellion against violent imperialist powers. By layering alternative views and fragmented versions of the story of the crocodile and the lover, Yahp arguably showcases a multifaceted narrative of history that places a spotlight on the repressed and marginalized. By using Gothic elements to represent commonly feared Others, Beth Yahp arguably deconstructs the Othering process and further provides insight into an alternative reading of history. However, Beth Yahp refuses to give a single reading to the story. Instead, she assigns fragmented pieces that are difficult to piece together to readers, and this allows different interpretations of the storyline to coexist. Such a non-chronological form leads readers to patch up the discontinuities themselves in order to obtain a coherent understanding of the multi-layered text. This is similar to the circuitous journey that the girl has to take, in order to reconcile with her historical pasts.

Chang Kuei-hsing's Borneo Chinese Identity

In a similar formulation, Sinophone Malaysian writer Chang Kuei-hsing (張貴興) situates jungle space as an important historical site. However, his jungle scene is set within the Borneo rainforests, when the area was not yet part of Malaysia²⁹. Born in Miri, British Borneo in 1956, Chang Kuei-hsing left Sarawak for Taipei at the age of 20 to further his education. Since then he has been staying on Formosa Island. His works have won critical acclaim and top awards in Taiwan, making him one of the most important Taiwan-based Sinophone Malaysian writers, alongside writers like Li Yong Ping (李永平), Ng Kim Chew (黃錦樹), Choon Yee Voon (鍾怡雯), Chan Tah Wei (陳大為) and others. The Borneo novelist Chang Kuei-hsing has contributed to the collection of Malaysian feature-length novels through his acclaimed Borneo Trilogy— *Qunxiang* (Elephants 《群象》, 1997(2006)), *Houbei* (Monkey Cup 《猴杯》, 2000) and *My South Seas Sleeping Beauty* 《我思念的長眠中的南國公主》 (2001), all of which are written in a mature and highly-skilled artistic language. The important Sinophone theorist Shih Shu-mei praises Chang's works as “deserving of the

²⁹ After the long Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), a plan of establishing a new nation-state Malaysia was put in place to conjoin Malaya with the British crown colonies Singapore, North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak in 1963. This plan was opposed by Indonesia's then president Sukarno as he saw it as a neo-colonialist puppet regime aimed to eradicate local communist struggles in the region. He then started the *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) campaign to fight against the Commonwealth and Malayan troops. See the second part of Chapter 4 for my discussion of Tash Aw's novel set against this period.

Nobel Prize”, which shows that Chang can be considered a canonical writer in Malaysia (Shih “Comparison” 96).

Chang’s works often depict mystical, historical and geographical features of the Borneo landscape. He uses this landscape to present the cultural interactions between the Chinese settlers and the indigenous community (the Dayaks). He also portrays Borneo during the Cold War period when the political turbulence was at its height. At the time, interaction between China, Southeast Asia and the Western colonizers comprised a series of imperialist “crossings” that reveal different layers of power relationships. These crossings arguably went beyond the binary of colonizer and colonized, perpetrator and victim. In this section, I will focus on the historical and cultural aspects of Chang’s postcolonial Gothic writings in *Elephants*, on his efforts to revisit leftist movements in the Cold War period. This part of history is particularly important as it constantly informs the identity formation of many Borneo Chinese. I argue that Chang employs the motifs of hunting and gathering—a custom of the indigenous tribes—to delineate the manifold power struggles in the Cold War battle. In the novel, he unveils the colonial desire that was present in different parties, including the settler Chinese whose desires were not only to acquire land and survive, but also to accumulate capital and economic power. Before examining Chang’s works, I will summarize a portion of Borneo’s relevant historical background to facilitate my subsequent analysis.

British Borneo comprises the protectorates of Sarawak under James Brooke's White Rajah regime, North Borneo (later renamed Sabah) under Chartered Company rule, and the Malay-Muslim Sultanate of Brunei. Immediately after the Second World War, the administered territories of Sarawak and North Borneo were transformed into British Crown colonies while Brunei remained a British protectorate. During that time in Peninsular Malaya, a state of Emergency was declared in 1948 in order to cope with the Communist-led "insurgency", which would end in 12 years later (the Malayan Emergency). Soon after the independence of Malaya was granted in 1957, the British wanted to withdraw its colonial commitment (including anti-communist forces) in the region and therefore proposed that the plan of Federation of Malaysia be realized in 1963 as the "ultimate aim of British policy" (Ooi K.G. 116). The then British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan claimed that the background of the plan was to

resolve the constitutional status of British Borneo territories; prevent these territories from being absorbed by either Indonesia or the Philippines; ensure Singapore did not fall under Chinese influence; and offer stability in the region, thereby reducing British military commitment as they gradually withdrew from Southeast Asia. (Ooi K.G. 116)

In fact, as noted by Malaysian historian Ooi Keat Gin, the proposed Malaysia scheme was "undoubtedly an anti-communist bulwark" (117). During which

time, the ethnic Chinese-led communists in Sarawak were the most active, and they forged ties with Sukarno's Left-oriented regime. Sukarno's "crush Malaysia" agenda aimed to resist the British's neo-colonial strategy of eradicating local communists' struggles. Nevertheless, his *Konfrontasi* campaign failed in 1965 when he was overthrown by a coup d'état launched by Suharto's army. Regrettably, not long after the regime change, an anti-communist purge was carried out, in which more 500,000 people were killed in Indonesia. Nevertheless, damaged relations between Malaysia and Indonesia were soon reestablished, and full diplomatic relation was restored in 1967 (Ooi K.G.125).

Chang's Borneo trilogy details a significant portion of the communist jungle war in Sarawak, yet it is in *Elephants* that he deals most directly with the question of History. *Elephants* portrays the jungle war between the Sarawak communists and the Malaysian Federation's counter-insurgency troops during the post-*Konfrontasi* period. It is set in the aftermath of the "Sri Aman Peace Action" from 1973 to 1974, when the communist leader Huang Jizuo (黃紀作) initiated peace talks between the party and the government. This soon had many communists surrendering their arms and walking out of jungle. In the novel, the protagonist Shi Shicai's (施仕才) uncle Yu Jiatong (余家同) is one of the few remainders of Sarawak communists hiding in the jungle after the Sri Aman Peace Action. He leads the last remaining guerrilla unit "Yangtze River Force", a troop that is famous for its boldness.

Above all, one important fact to note is that the Sarawak communists mentioned here should not be naturalised as “Malayan” communists—a common mistake that many critics make³⁰. In fact, Sarawak communists were inspired by the 1962 Brunei insurgency led by Brunei People’s Party’s leader A.M. Azahari, who proposed the establishment of a “Borneo Republic” that included Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. However, the proposal was not realized. The communists worked closely with Sukarno’s Indonesia during the *Konfrontasi* period and even received guerrilla training from Indonesia, held in the border areas between Malaysia and Indonesia (Tian 31). Sarawak communists had been operating under the name Sarawak People’s Guerrillas before they used the names Sarawak Communist Organisation (SCO), or the Clandestine Communist Organisation (CCO), or Sarawak Liberation League (SLL) and later the North Kalimantan Communist Party (NKCP).

Due to the complicated relationships between Borneo and the Malaysia nation-state, Sarawak writers reveal a different response to the national imagination of Malaysia, as well as to Sinophone Malaysian literature. Chang’s predecessor Li Yong Ping, for example, has strongly expressed a sense of dissatisfaction when people categorize him as a “Malaysian writer”. He insists that he is a Bornean writer, who was born in British Borneo and has never

³⁰ See, for example, Jing Tsu’s “The Elephant in the Room” in *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, in which she mixes up the Malayan Emergency and the Chinese education in Malaya with the Sarawak situation.

acknowledged the establishment of Malaysia (Wu and Shi 37-8). In particular, the Bornean writer³¹ often portrays the interaction between Chinese settlers and indigenous tribes, as well as the mystical nature of the Bornean rainforests, floras and faunas. These have a marked Gothic aesthetic spirit in their works that is rarely seen in writers from the Peninsular. In what follows, I will show how Chang employs his dense and exquisite language to portray the hunting of elephants during the jungle revolution as ways of imagining an ideal homeland. Here, he uses the Gothicized metaphor of elephant—similar to Beth Yahp's crocodile—to uncover the forms and layers of colonial power.

Cultural and National Imagination in the Elephants Hunting

As can be seen in *Monkey Cup* and *Elephants*, Chang often depicts the collaboration of Chinese protagonists and their Dayakan friends. They either embark on a *Heart Of Darkness*-like boat trip along Rajang river—the longest river in Malaysia—or trek through the maze of tropical rainforests to search for lost family members. In *Monkey Cup*, the protagonist, Zhi, looks for his sister, Limei, who escaped from the hospital in a lizard-like fashion after giving birth to a deformed child. Badu the Dayakan tracker, a tribesman whom Zhi meets during a mystical encounter with a Dayak tribe, joins him on his journey. From another

³¹ Borneo is a geographical space rather than a nation-state. In this chapter, I refer Borneo to include the connected histories of Sarawak, North Borneo (Sabah), Brunei and Kalimantan. Instead of specifying the narratives in Chang's novel as "Sarawakian", I tend to see them as "Bornean" because of the common culture and nature that they share.

angle, *Elephants* delineates the journey of Shi Shicai and his good friend Zhu Dezhong, a Chinese-educated Iban, who travel upstream along the river in search of Shicai's uncle Yu Jiatong. This is arguably Chang's tactic of intervention into the revolution, seeking a possibility for redemption or reconciliation with Nature and the indigenous Other. In both novels, it is through the rainforest journey that the protagonists Zhi and Shicai get to confront their historical common fear and arrive at reconciliation. For this purpose, Chang uses the metaphor of elephant to highlight power relations in the colonial system that constructs the common fear.

Similar to Beth Yahp's narrative strategy in *Crocodile*, Chang Kuei-hsing's *Elephants* is a bildungsroman narrated through the eyes of a growing boy, Shicai. Shicai, the only remaining heir of the Shi's family, is 19. He loses most of his family members to the communist struggles in Sarawak. During the active years of the troops, Shicai's four brothers—Shinong 仕農, Shishu 仕書, Shiwen 仕文 and Shishang 仕商 all follow their uncle's footsteps and walk into the jungle to join the communist struggle. Almost all of the Yangtze River force members, including Shicai's four brothers, are brutally killed in the anti-communist counter-insurgency. He then embarks on a journey into the jungle searching for his uncle in order to persuade him to surrender. Nevertheless, as we find out towards the end of novel, the truth is that Shicai plans to behead his uncle as revenge for the death of his brothers. During that time, Yu Jiatong's head is worth

a sky-high amount of reward. In the end, he walks out from the jungle with Yu Jiatong's corpse. He turns 20 and is now grown-up.

Yu Jiatong's troop is also called the "elephant-hunting troop" (獵象隊) as they also hunt for elephants' ivory for the capital to fund their revolution. Shicai had once joined their hunting trip when he was seven. During the journey he first heard about the legend of a herd of elephants that has existed for more than a hundred years.

狩獵隊伍的真正目的是在尋找傳說中已在婆羅洲繁衍和縱橫數百年的一支象群。象群約五、六十隻，也有人說約八、九十隻...象群經獵人和土人數百年掠殺，數目急驟下降...狩獵隊伍在一個乾涸湖泊發現大量象骸。(Chang, *Qunxiang* 36-9)

The real purpose of the hunting troop is to look for a legendary herd of elephants that has flourished in Borneo for more than hundred years. The herd is about fifty to sixty elephants, some say it is about eighty to ninety...Over the years, hunters and indigenous people have caught the elephants so they are abruptly dropping in numbers now...The hunting troop discovered a large number of elephant skeletons in a dried lake. (Chang, *Qunxiang* 36-9)

Witnessing the skeletons, Yu Jiatong perceives that the colonizers killed the elephants for their ivories. During the trip, Shicai misses an opportunity to witness an elephant skeleton "graveyard", as he is sick from his inability to acclimatize to the jungle. Ever since then, he has been attracted to the legend of the Bornean elephants. In fact, as we know by the end of novel, his maternal

grandmother was trampled to death by elephants on the day that he was born.

This is why his life is inevitably connected to elephants.

多年來象群的吸引力對男孩有增無減，常到圖書館查資料。令男孩驚訝的是和人類擁有相似壽命的大象也擁有相似的行為和感情。每一頭象都有不同的個性、脾氣、星座。富智慧、擅邏輯。用各種叫聲和夥伴溝通。搶救陷入險境、生病或受傷的夥伴。對病重的夥伴處以安樂死。漫遊荒野，居無定所，生活在團體和紀律中。老象離群獨居時易神經質和具攻擊性。(86)

Over the years, the boy's passion for elephants continues unabatedly. He often searches for related information in the library. The boy is surprised to discover that elephants have similar life spans, behaviours and feelings as humans. Each elephant has a different personality, temperament and horoscope. They are rich in wisdom, good in logic. They communicate with partners with variety of sounds. They rescue those who are in danger, sick or injured, euthanize those who are seriously ill. They roam in the wilderness with no place of abode, living in disciplined groups. The older elephants become easily neurotic and aggressive when they leave the group to live alone (86).

Shicai conducts careful research on the habits of elephants and finds that they are similar to humans. In a way, his fascination with elephants is similar to the troubled protagonist in Ng Kim Chew's "Fish Skeleton" (see Chapter 4), who is obsessed with turtle shells because it was the site of the first inscription of the Oracle. In particular, the employment of polysemous Chinese characters in both stories is symbolic. On the one hand, Ng's turtle (龜), which is pronounced as *gui*, is a homophone of the word "return" (歸). What *gui* symbolizes is the

inability to return to the paradoxical motherland China, where the most ancient Chinese characters (Oracle) was found, and the doubly marginal position that Chinese Malaysians are placed in in their homeland. On the other hand, Chang's elephants (象), which is pronounced as *xiang*, resembles the traditional *Han* pictograms (象形文字 *xiang xing wenzi* "image-form characters"), and is equivalent or interchangeable with "像", meaning "resemblance", "image", or "shape" (Bachner 191).

Andrea Bachner states that Chang's polysemic usage of *xiang* hinges on different levels of signification (192). She highlights a passage from 《韓非子·解老》 (*Han Feizi: Explanations of Antiquity*) to demonstrate the signified meanings that *xiang* 象 can bring.

人希見生象也，而得死象之骨，按其圖以想其生也。故諸人之所意想者，皆謂之象也。

It was extremely rare to see a live elephant, but people had obtained an elephant's skeleton, so they used its shape to imagine a live one. This is why people call whatever they imagine 象—"elephant"/"imagination" (192; Bachner's translation).

In other words, Chang's portrayal of elephant hunting is also an "imagination" of a live experience. And the imagining process is often mediated by Chinese characters—a symbol of Chinese culture. For Bachner, Chang's employment of the "sinograph" challenges the strongholds of Chinese-centrism, while resisting the essentialist fantasies of Chinese culture (177). Moreover, he mediates the

sinograph in the Chinese Malaysian culture, which successfully reinvents and redefines Chinese writing (178). The sinograph signifies an imagination of the ideal homeland, and it “becomes a kind of master signifier which...operates its own gliding and *displacement*” (Bachner 192; italics added). While Chang calls into question the “cultural imagination” of Chinese essentialism among many Chinese Malaysians, I argue that the Gothic symbol of elephants in the novel also expresses the feeling of displacement in the anti-colonial “national imagination” of Bornean Chinese during the Cold War period.

In the novel, many young men, including Shicai’s four brothers, become communist guerrillas in response to the revolution in mainland China. Like their Malayan counterparts, the Sarawak communists are predominantly Chinese. These young men are motivated by a sense of cultural pride in the Chinese language and beliefs, which they are taught in schools³². The Shi brothers attend the Chinese classes conducted by their much-admired Teacher, Shao An, who was born and educated on the mainland and came to Borneo to spread communist ideology. It is under Teacher Shao An and Yu Jiatong’s influence that the Shi brothers take off for the jungle, but the result is an early, brutal death.

仕商也有一個宏願，要學成一身精湛武藝「報國」。

「哥哥，你報什麼國？」

四哥不答。(45)

³² See Ooi Keat Gin’s “The Cold War and British Borneo: Impact and Legacy 1945-1963”, especially the section “Communists in the schoolyard” for his analysis on how Borneo Chinese youth received education about Chinese communism in school.

Shishang also has a great aspiration. He wants to learn superb skills to “devote himself to the nation”.

“Brother, what nation do you devote yourself to?”

Fourth Brother does not answer. (45)

What is the nation that Yu Jiatong and the Shi brothers fight for? Is it Sarawak where they stand on, or is it Malaysia, which is their official “nation” at the time, or is it the motherland China where all their revolutionary ideas come from? The in-between position and the sense of displacement silence Shishang as he is not able to answer it. The same question has also disabled the fellow comrades’ national imagination. During this time, the Yangtze troop is the last remaining communist force in Sarawak, as most of their comrades have surrendered in accordance with the Sri Aman Peace Action. When Shicai finally gets to Yu Jiatong’s base in the dense jungle, he discovers that the remaining communist fighters no longer yearn to achieve the socialist ideals. Instead, they have realized that the failed revolution is a meaningless consumption of spirit. Thus, they no longer hunt for the legendary herd of elephants, but only hunt birds and beasts for fun. The final collapse of the revolution has turned the once-heroic Yu Jiatong into an empty shell who exists meaninglessly. Revolution loses its way to capitalism, and thus an ideal homeland is no longer a possibility.

Expansion of Colonial Capitals, Extinction of Elephants

Among the few articles that discuss Chang's works, most of them either focus on the Sinographic formulation³³, or the postcolonial situation³⁴. Although these features are important elements that constitute Chang's poetics of writing, I am of the view that his Gothicized metaphor of the elephant has to be seen within Cold War discourse. In other words, one has to pay attention to the unnaturally constructed nationalist (and anti-communist) project during the Cold War, one that has since altered the identity formation of Bornean Chinese. In this regard, Alison M. Groppe points out the memories of communism in Chang's *Elephants* and concludes that they are Chang's means to provide "multifaceted critiques of Sarawak's communist insurgency" (Groppe 253). However, in my opinion, Chang's critiques are based on the motifs of communist struggles that have succumbed to capitalist accumulation, one that is generated by the leader Yu Jiatong's colonial thinking. In other words, Chang's critiques are not directed against the communist struggles itself.

With this intention, Chang calls into question the meaning of revolution and the ultimate goal that sustained the Sarawak communist revolution. In the novel, he unveils the colonial desire present in various parties, not only from the British colonizers and Japanese imperialists, but also from the Chinese settlers who gain wealth in the ivory trade. As noted by Sinophone writer Ng Kim Chew,

³³ See Jing Tsu's article above, and Andrea Bachner's "Reinventing Chinese Writing: Zhang Guixing's Sinographic Translations".

³⁴ See Brian Bernards's "Plantation and Rainforest: Chang Kuei-hsing and a South Seas Discourse of Coloniality and Nature".

the communist history seems to be an “original sin” (*yuanzui* 原罪) of all Chinese Malaysians, as the state ruling class has imposed the images of Chinese as “rebellious, not loyal, not recognized, or as communist spy” (Ng, “*Cong geren de tiyan*” 255). However, in my opinion, Chang seeks to break through this rhetoric of race, or the language of Chinese victimology. Instead, he portrays the accumulation of Chinese capital to highlight the imperialist, capitalist violence that are internalized by Chinese entrepreneurs. In a way, the expansion of capital is a colonial violence against the jungle ecology. As an illustration, Chang places a spotlight on the invasion of global capitalism in the communist struggle itself, which results in the death of Yu Jiatong and the extinction of the legendary herd of elephants.

At this stage, one can easily link *Elephants* with Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and Yu Jiatong with the ivory trader Kurtz (Ng, “*Cong geren de tiyan*” 253-5). Over the course of his stay in Africa, the European gentleman Kurtz is mystified as a demigod worshipped by the natives but is in effect a corrupted colonial tyrant. In a similar way, Yu Jiatong is well known nationally as a revolutionary hero. However, he is responsible for the many deaths of his comrades that were caused by factionalism, and he goes even further to vent his sexual desires on his female comrades. Moreover, he covets fame, worshippers and capitals. He tells Shicai:

「革命成功，我可以把賭博合法化，在雨林蓋一座國際性賭場，給你父親去管理。」

「這不是資產社會玩意？」

「時代不一樣了。革命就是革新。這句話，我從前對人民說過。那時候，我走在拉讓江畔，人民待我如皇帝，視我的部隊如御林軍。每至一鎮，人民烹雞宰羊款待。新聞界說揚子江部隊是拉讓江畔『地下政府』？這名字多難聽。我們軍隊是人民保姆。人民的困難，只要找揚子江部隊申訴，都可以得到解決...」(113)

“When the revolution succeeds, I will legalize gambling and build an international casino in the rainforests. I will leave it for your father to manage.”

“Isn’t this a capitalist society thing?”

“Times has changed. Revolution is innovation. I have told my people the same before. At that time, when I was walking along Rajang River, the people treated me like emperor; they saw my troop as their guards. Every town that we went, the people there treated us hospitably with chickens and goats. The news says that Yangtze River Force is the “Underground government”? How terrible is the name. Our troop is the people’s nanny. Their difficulties can be solved if they come to us...” (Chang, *Qunxiang* 113)

As can be seen, Yu Jiatong speaks in a colonial language. He represents the Chinese settlers who mediate the colonial system, making profit as “middleman settler colonizers” (Shih, “Comparison” 89). In this regard, Yu has given up all the socialist ideals in communism, losing his way to capitalism. To grapple with the transition, Chang portrays manifold power relations during the Cold War, not simply the colonizer-versus-colonized binary. In this regard, the protagonist Shicai, along with his indigenous friend Dezhong, proceed to discover the real oppressed amid the power relations—Nature and the indigenous tribes. For this

purpose, Chang arguably conjoins his ecological concerns with the postcolonial Gothic and creates decaying images of a revolutionary fighter Yu Jiatong, whose image resonates with the near-extinct elephants that he meets on the last day of his life.

Towards the end of the story, Yu Jiatong already knows that Shicai wants his head. He grants Shicai's wish but asks that his nephew first journey with him to the rainforests one last time to hunt for the legendary herd of elephants. Finally, they come across the targeted herd beside a lake. But through a telescope, they discover that all the elephants are seriously injured—with "wounds that could only appear on corpses" (160). Moreover, they frenziedly bump their body against a giant tree (161).

甥舅現在看到的不像是象，而是一塊會行走的腐肉。一個像波浪正在翻騰的傷口占了母象整個臀部，漫至整隻右後肢。後肢已近潰爛，骨骼露出，使牠行走時一顛一拐。草地象群停止行走，又一聲呼喚，失去臀部的母象試圖加快速度。(162)

What the uncle and nephew see is not an elephant, but walking carrion. A wound that rolls like waves has occupied the entire hips of the mother elephant. It has spread to the whole right hind leg. The leg is nearly festering; its bone is exposed, which makes her limp. The herd of elephants on grassland stops walking; they call the mother elephant one more time. The hipless mother elephant attempts to rush along. (162)

Witnessing the decayed images of the legendary elephant herd, Yu Jiatong does not hunt them but watches them carefully. At this stage, Chang juxtaposes the

wounded elephant with Yu's image of a fallen revolutioner. He also alludes to a limping communist revolution that embraces capitalism at the cost of jungle ecology and human nature. To undermine the imperialist power/knowledge link, Chang stages collaboration between Shicai and Dezhong—a Chinese and a Dayak—who behead Yu Jiatong after the elephant encounter. In fact, Dezhong's tribe has long resented Yu and want to behead him for the large monetary award. He is aware that Shicai has the same intention so he patiently waits for the nephew to seize his opportunity.

As can be seen, Shicai's journey to the rainforests is juxtaposed with the traditional headhunting practice carried out by the Dayakan tribe. Dezhong's family gives him a blade, and dance the "warrior dance" for him. Dezhong's sister Fatiah—who is in love with Shicai—gives him wild boar's teeth as a Dayakan amulet for the headhunting warrior (170). This staging of the Chinese and Dayak collaboration is arguably Chang's tactic to seek a possibility of reconciliation with Nature and the indigenous Other. Moreover, the murder of Yu Jiatong is a powerful deconstruction of a historically common fear—not of the communists but of the imperialist power/knowledge that has shaped postcolonial Malaysia. It is to cut off the meaningless revolution that is conducted according to the logic of imperialist thinking and global capitalism. That is why when Dezhong tells Shicai that they killed Yu together when Shicai was heavily drunk; the latter says that he only killed a big lizard (171). The mystical, intoxicated scene of beheading of Yu is mingled with Shicai's unconscious

imagination that he is drinking with the Dayaks. In this way, Chang employs a Gothic feature to challenge the Enlightenment humanist and rationalist discourse that forms part of colonial knowledge. Thus, Yu Jiatong is imagined as a non-human or ab-human figure, decaying like the elephant's rotten haunch. And Shicai, like an indigenous warrior, cuts off the residual colonial knowledge even though they are intimately linked, like uncle and nephew.

After Yu's death, Shicai finds his uncle's *Elephant Hunting Notebook* 《獵象扎記》 among his relics. It is preserved intact, "like a complete corpse" in a tin box (165). Shicai discovers Yu's records about the last time they saw the wounded elephant herd.

「一九七四年七月十二日。晴。凌晨五點。砂勝越第三省和印尼加里曼丹交界處，支隆河上游附近。目睹婆羅洲本世紀最龐大象群在草原上覓食戲水。成象十二。幼象一。公象三。幼象和母象健壯，其餘惡疾纏身，皮脫毛落，遍體爛瘡壞疽...不出半月，病象即亡.....」 (164)

"12th July, 1974. Sunny. 5am. At the border between Sarawak's third province and Kalimantan, near the upstream Sadong river. Witnessed the century's largest herd of elephants in Borneo foraging for food, playing with water on the grassland. Twelve adult elephants. One baby elephant. Three male elephants. The babies and mothers are strong, but the rest suffer from malignant diseases. Their skins and hairs come off, ulcers and gangrenes grow over the bodies... In less than half a month, the sick elephants die..." (164)

Shicai then imagines that Yu deletes the final sentence and writes in its place “Several months later, all are extinct...” (不出數月，全體滅絕...) That is to say, the extinction of *xiang* 象 (elephant/imagination) also declares the collapse of the cultural (Chinese) and national (Malaysia) imagination of the Borneo Chinese communists. And it also points to the collapse of Yu Jiatong’s leftist revolution that has been contaminated by capitalism.

Intriguingly, the only thing that he is able to leave to the next generation is the notebook. Like a diary, or a memoir, the notebook records the hunting process in the Bornean rainforests. It thus resembles Yu’s leftist struggles for an ideal homeland during the Cold War. Crafting what is arguably a metafictional episode in the novel, Chang here “make[s] a statement about the creation of that fiction” (Waugh, *Metafiction* 6). The notebook, similar to Chang’s Bornean trilogy, is a means to literally “return” to the Bornean homeland, excavating its different layers of history. Chang’s “return to the rainforests” (*chongfan yulin* 重返雨林), as the title of his preface to *Monkey Cup* puts it, is shaped by his Gothic, mystical and grotesque portrayal of Bornean rainforests and animals. He sees the rainforests as the mother of earth and the Muse of his creation: “My mother, the rainforest, mother earth, and the lungs of the world—please let me twitch. Let my filthy genes seep below your roots, and through your nurturing soil, let them be reincarnated and have a chance to live again”³⁵ (Chang, *Monkey Cup* 12).

³⁵ This passage is translated by Brian Bernards in his essay “Plantation and Rainforest: Chang Kuei-hsing and a South Seas Discourse of Coloniality and Nature”.

As a whole, on the one hand, Chang's staging of the power struggles against the backdrop of jungle space has yielded a powerful critique of the colonial authority's anti-communist strategy. On the other, it criticizes the Chinese-centrist communist movement, which has turned into capitalist, colonial desires. In doing that, he emphasises the real oppressed in this network of manifold power relations—Nature and the indigenous tribes—that has long been overlooked. Chang adopts the Gothicized metaphor of "*xiang*" to call into question the concept of Chinese essentialism and the nationalist violence conducted against the Bornean landscape. As a Taiwan-based Bornean writer, his way of returning to the mother earth/Bornean rainforests can only be done through the gateway of writing. By employing the poetics of the Gothic, Chang arguably dismantles a haunted aspect of Cold War history. Additionally, he successfully deciphers the power relations that are concealed in the language of coloniality. As Brian Bernards puts it, Chang's literary "return" has "imaginative and figurative value with respect to its local context of articulation" (Bernards 336). In other words, what *xiang* (elephant/imagination) generates is a decolonized articulation that works towards reconciling Nature with the indigenous community of Borneo.

Summary

The genre of postcolonial Gothic in fiction has facilitated critiques against the colonial powers and forms that marginalize the oppressed Other. By

applying Gothic criticism on postcolonial texts, we can uncover complicated power relations. At the same time, it is possible to highlight the Othering process that takes place. Gothic style enables a questioning of colonial, Enlightenment notions contained in humanist and rationalist discourse. This can eventually lead to the overturning of colonial ways of perception. In doing so, one has to maintain a sense of historicity, to reach for specific historical frameworks that continue to haunt the present. In the context of Malaysia, this refers to the Cold War that continues to divert scholarly attention from problems created by residual colonial power/knowledge. During this period, British colonizers and state nationalists collaborated hand in hand to eradicate communist struggles that actually gave strength to de-imperializing forces in society. In this regard, postcolonial Gothic writers formulate a representation of the idealist national allegorical romance in order to deconstruct the “common fear” in Cold War history. Both Beth Yahp and Chang Kuei-hsing situate the narrative of their Gothic novels in the jungle—a space where communists and anti-communist power conducted a jungle battle. The writers make use of the mystical nature of the jungle to depict the history of isolation and constraint during the Cold War.

Beth Yahp, on the one hand, adopts a non-chronological structure in her fiction to challenge the single-sided narrative given in the official historiography. By engaging supernatural elements of Chinese/Malaysian folk beliefs for instance the notion of the “third eye”, Yahp seeks to discover alternative readings of history. Moreover, she compares the image of a crocodile with the communist

leader who undergoes a kind of metamorphosis. This process can be seen as a powerful rebellion against imperialist power. It further deconstructs the mentioned common fear and fills the gaps in history. Chang Kuei-hsing in turn places a spotlight on Bornean Cold War history. He describes the ambiguous identity formation of the Bornean Chinese, unveiling the colonial desires that surfaced in different layers of power. In so doing, Chang revisits leftist movements and struggles conducted in the rainforests of Sarawak during the Cold War, which objected to what it considered a “neo-colonial” plot – the establishment of “Malaysia”. Similar to Yahp’s narrative strategy of a bildungsroman, Chang also delineates the story of a growing teenager looking for redemption and reconciliation. Both Yahp’s 14-year-old girl and Chang’s 19-year-old boy start a journey of searching for their pasts and historical memories. While the girl, Yahp’s protagonist, reunites with her communist father (the crocodile) after gathering fragmented stories about him, Chang’s protagonist Shicai collaborates with his Dayakan friend Dezhong to cut off the colonial, capitalist knowledge manifested in the name of the communist revolution. In the end, they dismantle the haunted aspect of the Cold War history, and call into question the common fear constructed by authorities. They also perform reconciliation between the past and mother earth.

Chapter Four: Mapping the South Seas

Literary Cartographies in the fiction of Ng Kim Chew and Tash Aw

Sometimes he could imagine the sea. And this was when he felt the happiest, but also the saddest, for the night seemed long and deep and silent. He wished that this place had no past. (Tash Aw, *Map of the Invisible World*, 342)

Literature can function as a form of mapping, as the writing of literature tends to involve a cartographic project. Writers of fiction seek to make sense of “real” places in their fiction or they create imaginary places that bear similarities to the actual world. Although this dissertation draws on temporal concerns in order to understand the Cold War, such as the focal point of year 1948 and 1969, it does not overlook the spatiality that the literatures involved. Over the years, the argument for the “spatial turn” in literature has been advanced by the important geocritics such as Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, Bertrand Westphal, Edward Soja and so on. They have raised questions about the representations of spatial politics, and propose a shift in understanding the concept of place with a broader range of vision: through the negotiation of time and space—a spatiotemporal scheme.

In view of this, this chapter focuses on the Cold War’s spatiotemporality in specified literary imaginaries; it will examine the works of Sinophone writer Ng Kim Chew and Anglophone novelist Tash Aw who, in their narrative mapping, position a spatio-temporal place of the Cold War South Seas (Nanyang

南洋, or Southeast Asia in today's terms). In resonance with Chang Kuei-hsin and Beth Yahp, whose works give voice to those who have experienced the Cold War as part of their daily lives, Ng and Aw further draw out a symbiotic map of the peripheral South Seas in which they adopt a geocentered approach to narrate spatial events. This chapter studies their artistic representations of the geographical referent—the South Seas—and juxtaposes with it the Cold War's historical temporality. It argues that their literary representations of the referent are “interdependent and interactive”, manifesting what Bertrand Westphal calls “reciprocal creation”—not simply a “one-way activity of a gaze looking from one point to another” but also considering “other reciprocating gazes” (Westphal 116). To put it in another way, by using a fictional approach to narrate the geopolitical situation, their works not only supplement the history of the Cold War with various psychosocial faces, but also advance an aesthetical representations of the event in the South Seas. Their narrative mapping allows a multi-vocal and multifaceted examination of the Cold War to take place, and more importantly positions a geographical picture of a place at the periphery of the Cold War—the South Seas. In doing so, they not only make sense of space by means of fiction writing, but also formulate the different ways in which the spatial referent can be perceived.

Ng Kim Chew, over twenty years, continues to write “bits and pieces” about the Malayan Communist Party in order to build up dialogues with Sinophone Malaysian language and histories. He endeavors to create a fictional

Nanyang to de/reconstruct the mobility and fluidity of Chinese diaspora and map the dissemination of the Chinese leftist revolution³⁶. In doing that, he always positions himself at a doubly-marginal point of departure, narrating in the language of violence, lust and greed. Tash Aw, on the other hand, uses the sublime and beauty, attempting to connect Malaysia with its surrounding regions through mapping contemporary history. In my opinion, their works can be viewed as a form of narrative mapping—a “literary cartography” project which Robert Tally Jr. envisions as writers mapping the “social spaces” of their world, while geocritics read these maps and draw attention to “the spatial practices involved in literature” (Tally, *Geocritical Explorations* 1). Through such practices, they spatialize “South Seas” narratives, putting them in a broader range of vision, while simultaneously positioning Malaysia as the point of departure and reference. At the same time, their acts of writing can be further seen as a constellation of different geopolitical engagements, in which they manifest a diasporic yet local identity to make sense of the history of Malaysia.

In the following sections, I will first analyze Ng Kim Chew’s early works such as “Fish Skeletons” (1995) and “Backcarving” (2001) to explore how he uses Sinophone language as a “right” thereby cementing his identity as a member of the Chinese diaspora, and also as a tool to resist language fetishism and Chinese

³⁶ In this chapter, I refer the “Sinophone” to the linguistic and cultural constellation of the Southeast Asian Chinese, as what have been defined in the *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Shih Shu-mei, Tsai Chien-hsin and Brian Bernards. For the term “Chinese”, I use it as an ethnic reference, and also referring it to Mainland China in historical and cultural terms, unless otherwise mentioned.

essentialism. Following that, I will examine his more recent works — the Nanyang revolutionary trilogy: *Memorandum of the People's Republic of Nanyang* 南洋人民共和國備忘錄(2013), *As If Seeing Fuyu* 猶見扶餘 (2014) and *Fish* 魚(2015), to probe into his endeavor of revisioning, or more precisely subverting, the communist history in Malaysia by means of his metafictional and intertextual techniques. I argue that his narrative of the communist history in Malaysia is still backboneed by the history of the Chinese diaspora and Chinese literature. He also expresses doubts in the process of revolution. In the second part of this chapter, I will examine Tash Aw's fiction, particularly his second novel *Map of the Invisible World* (2009), to explore his narration of the fraternity between Indonesia and Malaysia, and how a symbiotic link and common culture can be further drawn in the creation of what Homi Bhabha calls a "Third Space" by means of his use of the metaphor of the sea.

Ng Kim Chew and the Sinophone language and histories

"Ng Kim Chew" (Huang Jinshu 黃錦樹) is a name people love and hate. A writer and an academic himself, Ng not only produces many representative creative works, but also works to theorize Sinophone Malaysian literature with his thought-provoking essays. He earned himself the nickname of "enfant terrible" (*huai haizi* 壞孩子) for his sharp criticisms that lash out against the prevailing sense of complacency of the writers and critics within the field (Wang

D.D.W. “Enfant Terrible” 11). Ng won first prize of the China Times Literary Award with his short story “Fish Skeleton” when he was still a graduate student in Taiwan in the 1990s. At the time, he had already made his name in Malaysia when he claimed that Sinophone Malaysian literature does not have a canon (*jingdian* 經典). He further heavily criticized the writing of realist fictions in Malaysia, which found their roots from China, when he asserted that Sinophone Malaysian literature should already be “weaned” (*duan nai* 斷奶) from the China motherland. These criticisms, of course, caused a local uproar, especially from the writers of older generation. The site of Sinophone Malaysian literature, which had always attracted small numbers of audience, had never been so bustling before³⁷. Ng claims that this act is to burn the plantation (*shao ba* 燒芭, a traditional Southeast Asian agricultural way of clearing land for more cultivation), as the field of Sinophone Malaysian literature has been too barren. He suggests setting fire on the older land in order to fertilize it for the further nourishment of more healthy seedlings. For him, the future of Sinophone Malaysian literature has to be modernist literature. Many critics describe this turbulent period as the “Ng Kim Chew phenomenon”.

Born in the state of Johor and brought up in the rubber estates, Ng Kim Chew turns his experiences and imagination of the estates into the backdrop of his stories. Similar to many Chinese Malaysians, he furthered his studies in

³⁷ For the debates in this period, please see Zhang Yong Xiu 張永修, Zhang Guangda 張光達 and Lim Choon Bee 林春美 (eds).

Taiwan after graduating from a Chinese-medium high school, bidding farewell to his homeland which, in his view, values only the Malay sovereignty in politics, education and language. Like his counterparts, he is labeled as an “overseas compatriot student” (*qiaosheng* 僑生) by the Republic of China (Taiwan) ³⁸. Setting foot on another marginalized zone of Chinese culture in Taiwan (where mainland China remains the “central”), Ng starts questioning the general pursuit of so-called literary and cultural “Chineseness” by Sinophone Malaysians. He writes an essay dealing with “the south where the language is lost”, spreading out the route in the global south where Chinese migrants took to write in Sinophone articulations (but not standard Chinese) when facing the centrifugal environment, cultures and languages (Ng “Sinophone/Chinese”). He also asserts that the process that Sinophone Malaysians take to construct the imagination of Chinese culture has already been objectified, in which “China” has become an emotional, affective symbol. Furthermore, he claims that ethnic Chinese Malaysians consciously turn the symbol into ritual performances, for example, as in the annual Chinese poetry recital show “Dong Di Yin 動地吟”. For Ng, the underlying power in the show is arguably strengthened by a sense of Chinese cultural crisis in Malaysia (Ng “Zhongguoxing”). To borrow from the renowned

³⁸ The title “Overseas Compatriot Student” was given to the children of overseas Chinese, encouraging them to return to their “motherland” (Republic of China) to receive proper Chinese education. The policy was implemented after the Kuomintang government’s move to Taiwan, and has been in practice to date (I myself “benefited” from the policy during my undergraduate studies). The long-term phenomenon of Chinese Malaysian students studying in Taiwan is arguably a product of the global Cold War structure as the disrupted communication with People’s Republic of China made studying in China almost impossible during that time. The division of two Chinas has certainly affected the identity and consciousness of Chinese Malaysians towards the Chinese culture. Many Sinophone Malaysian writers have tried to respond to this rupture.

scholar David Der-wei Wang, Ng Kim Chew is always scornful of the Chinese cultural and linguistic fetishism performed by many Sinophone Malaysian writers.

此一中國想像的癥結之一可以見諸於馬華作家對中文——優美的中州正韻——的戀物崇拜。如何體認中文及中國在馬華族群想像中的歷史權宜性，善加操作，從而確立馬華文化本身的活力及多元面向，成為當務之急。

It is the writers' top priority to realize the historical expediency of China and the Chinese language in the imagination of ethnic Chinese Malaysians, and to operate it wisely in order to establish a dynamic and multifaceted Sinophone Malaysian culture. (Wang D.D.W. "Enfant Terrible" 13)

Here, we could argue that the aftermath of Cold War had affected Ng Kim Chew, who was studying in marginal Taiwan, into being skeptical of patrimonial Chinese culture. Yet he had been constantly using Chinese characters to repeat the cultural identity predicaments that ethnic Chinese Malaysians had been facing. The problematic formation of Chinese/Sinophone words, culture, histories and identity were questions that he had been making inquiries into. In a similar manner, the (re)writing of the history of the Chinese diaspora and revolution in his works are Ng's literary actions to fill in the gaps in official history, either in China or in Malaysia. Since his departure for Taiwan, for more than 20 years, Ng has published seven volumes of short-stories collection, one prose collection and five academic essays collection. Since the 90s, his writings

involve the re-creation of historical landscapes of Malaysia, especially the rubber estates (where he grew up) and the legends of Malayan Communist Party, whose stories occurred around the estates and jungles. On the other hand, Taiwanese experience has also interfered and enriched his writings about “home” and history. These images (the rubber estates, MCP, Taiwanese academia) continuously form the historical background in Ng’s works, and become important symbols for Ng to construct his imagination of the Sinophone histories. His short stories are seemingly *sui generis*, yet reciprocally work in concert with one another intertextually. This shows Ng’s effort to probe into various fragments of histories, subverting them and further rewriting them.

This section will put Ng’s creative works as its main subject of analysis, while his literary criticisms will serve as ancillary materials for me to understand and restore Ng’s ideological mapping as a writer. From “Fish Skeleton” (1995), “Backcarving” (2001) to *Memorandum of People’s Republic of Nanyang* (2013), how does Ng continuously reflect upon the complexities of “Chineseness” and the “Sinophone”? Meanwhile, how does he play his role as a Sinophone literary citizen and revisit the history of the Malayan communists? These are issues to be tackled in the following parts.

“Fish Skeleton” (yu hai 魚骸): Returning to the Homeland

In response to his own reflections regarding the concepts of Chineseness and nationalism, Ng Kim Chew wrote his magnum opus “Fish Skeleton” in 1995.

The protagonist, a Malaysian professor teaching Chinese at National Taiwan University, seeks shelter in Formosa Island in order to escape from his home country and the political nightmare of his brother's death. This reticent existentialist hero is always in a depressive state, seemingly having concealed an unspeakable secret. It turns out that he has been secretly cooking turtle meat in his office, masturbating with the turtles and craving letters on their shells. We later find out that his brother, who died mysteriously in Malaysia, is found in a swamp with lots of turtle shells alongside, years after his death. His head and body are separated.

The protagonist's brother disappeared into the jungle after joining the Malayan Communist Party when he was 18. Forty years later, his skeleton is found, only to prove that he died at the year of his disappearance. At the time, the protagonist was only a primary school student. When he enters secondary school, he stays away from the Leftist study group in school and feels downhearted about all the revolutionary stories that his classmates are so interested in. It is not until he meets a senior nicknamed "Changbai Mountain 長白山" who takes care of him like a real brother, that he starts reading Lu Xun and Ba Jin. However, his growing interests in these revolutionary writers do not give rise to his revolutionary spirit. Instead, they stimulate his interests in Chinese literature and culture, which allow him to feel connected to his missing brother. For him, his brother and the revolutionary era seem to have long gone, and he could never be one of the "sons and daughters from the era", only "the era's

laggard" (Ng "*yu hai*" 200). Unlike his brother who fought hard for revolution, the fate of their motherland (China) and the homeland (Malaya) are not his concerns. Thus he cannot understand why his brother and most of his classmates had been dying to return to the Great Wall or Yangtze River, or even harbored dreams of engraving their names on the stone of the motherland (193).

Instead, China to him is "a curse that causes the death of brothers and all sons and daughters from the era" (194). It seems that the only connection that he makes with China is through the Chinese scripts, and this gives rise to his curiosity about the "Oracle"—referring to the origin of Chinese characters inscribed on animal bones or turtle shells during the Shang dynasty. When he finally settles down at National Taiwan University, he often fishes for turtles at the NTU Drunken Moon Lake and grills them inside his office for consumption. Furthermore, he inscribes the Oracle scripts onto the turtle shells, as though returning to that ancient time. This secret hobby can be traced back to his high school days, when "Changbai Mountain" told him about the mysterious Oracle. The boys had even discovered that among the turtle shells unearthed in China, some large land turtle shells could likely be tributes from the Malay Peninsula over 3000 years ago. This discovery had turned the protagonist's aloofness into excitement.

The existentialist search for oneself in "Fish Skeleton" not only reflects the protagonist's effort to get rid of the nightmare of the political history of Malaysia, but also emphasizes his rejection of the so-called "motherland", an idea that he

simply does not understand. Nevertheless, politics have embroiled his whole family and he can never escape it, even when he finds shelter in Taiwan. He carries the burden of the fatherly image of his brother and the failed imagination of the motherland all the way to this new country, and immerses himself into ancient Chinese literature. When he found that the earliest Chinese characters inscribed on turtle shells might be from the Malay Peninsula, his surge of excitement evoked the emotional connection between the turtle and his homeland Malaya.

In the Chinese language, turtle (龜) is pronounced as *gui*, which is a homophone of the word “return” (歸). What *gui* symbolizes is the animalization of Chinese characters as written on the *gui* 龜 shells, and also the diasporic Chinese’s not being able to *gui* 歸 (“return”) to the paradoxical motherland China. To put it in another way, what the protagonist achieves when he masturbates with the inscribed turtles is a connection to his homeland Malaya, as well as to his brother, and this reconciliation has to be done through the medium of Chinese characters. This bodily link to the homeland is concretely done through the convergence of “flesh and blood” (*xie rou* 血肉), but not through nostalgic imagination. Symbolically, this connection is realized at the climax when the protagonist picks up a part of his brother’s bones from the swamp, he is well aware that that is the “most special part” that connects the head and the body (207). He takes the bones remains (*yu hai* 餘骸, which is the homophone of

the title “fish skeleton” *yu hai* 魚骸) and the scattered *gui* 龜 shells away with him, and again “flees” to Taiwan.

Interestingly, the image of the writer Ng Kim Chew seems to echo this juxtaposition as he is symbolically saddled with the remains of the national, cultural and familial history of his own, fleeing to Taiwan in hope of settling down. Yet, Taiwan is another marginal place in terms of international politics and Chinese culture, and Ng’s centrifugal position along with his sharp criticisms of the literary field catches him in the swamp. Nevertheless, this is the way that he makes his return (*gui* 歸) to the homeland and to the Chinese culture from a doubly-marginal point of departure. By and large, his narration mapping in this story showcases the intertwined relationships of ethnic Chinese Malaysians caught between the geopolitics of China, Taiwan and Malaysia; and what links them together in Ng’s literary cartography project is arguably Chinese/Sinophone language and culture.

“Backcarving” (*ke bei* 刻背): Overcoming Language and Cultural Fetishism

Continuing from the motifs in “Fish Skeleton”, “Backcarving” (2001) again returns to the mysterious scene of the Oracle infatuation, but this time the site is further extended to an encounter with necrophilia. In this story, the Chinese characters, which are either less or extra in strokes, are engraved on the flesh body. A British merchant, Mr. Fu, who left China for Nanyang during the

late Qing and early Republic period, opens brothels for the expatriate Chinese writers or officials looking for entertainment in a foreign land. Upholding his enthusiasm and fascination with the Chinese language, he goes so far as to abandon his own language and learns Chinese from scratch. More insanelly, he engraves the Chinese words onto the back of many Chinese coolies, claiming that looking at these characters shining in the coolies' beads of sweat under the sun, he sees "the oldest form of Chinese characters" and finds the "most profound, esoteric meaning of the Chinese" (Ng "Ke bei" 353-4).

It seems that "Backcarving" continues Ng's criticism of paradoxical Chinese essentialism as he deals with the almost fetishistic affection of Chinese culture in the two stories. Nonetheless, one important formulation that "Backcarving" has extended from the previous story is that the language fetishism has been injected into the "flesh and blood" in engraved forms, like the ancient tattoos registered by the indigenous tribes. What is more, in the story Ng gives impetus to the criticism of colonial power relations, as seen in the character of Mr. Fu³⁹.

Taiwanese scholar Chan Min-hsu has noted the colonial metaphor underlying Ng's narratives, as he points out that Ng's works in fact "discuss about how Malaysian Chineseness is involved in the entire colonial system of

³⁹ Mr. Fu's language fetishism can be seen as a criticism to the western Sinologists' fetishism of Chinese characters, such as Ezra Pound's play with imagism in Chinese poetry. Shih Shu-mei raised this connection in her talk at National University Singapore on 9th May, 2014, titled "Racializing Area Studies, defetishizing China".

knowledge production" (Chan M. 67; my translation). He states that the British colonial power, as represented by Mr. Fu, has deeply engraved its ownership on the back of the Malaysian Chinese, which implies that "colonialism will tie up the Chinese and Chineseness firmly" (Chan M.67). Besides, in the novel we see that a local history professor Prof. Yu (鬻先生) brings a team of Taiwanese researchers to do their fieldwork in Singapore. This is Ng's tactic to highlight a "non-local" point of view, telling a story about "gazing, narrating and representing Malaysian Chinese through the Taiwanese eyes" (69). Chan is of the view that "Backcarving" attentively responds to the "Southward policy" promulgated by the Kuomintang government in Taiwan in the 1990s⁴⁰. In other words, the story attempts to picture a non-Western colonial desire, which was generated by Taiwan in the shadow of its localization project (Taiwan's independence), and the story sharply points out "the hidden worries underlying this transnational links" (72). Chan's opinion resonates with Chen Kuan-hsing's critiques in his important book *Asia as Method*, in which Chen lays out how the Taiwanese colonial desire and its discourse was formed and shaped in the Southward Policy narratives in his first chapter.

Chan's analysis is a critical reflection of a Taiwanese researcher working on Sinophone Malaysian literature, in which he also rightly indicates that all

⁴⁰ In 1994, President Lee Teng-hui put forward the "Southward policy", which was aimed at promoting economic and trade cooperation with Southeast Asia, and encouraged Taiwanese corporations to invest in Southeast Asia to enhance the economic relationship with Southeast Asia.

minority discourse (such as the Sinophone theory) has to face the hidden worries of its desire of power expansion when carrying through transnational links. In other words, Sinophone theory, which sets out to criticize China-centrism and Western-dominated theory, might give impetus to another form of colonial desire when it tries hard to map out the Sinophone territory in the world⁴¹. Standing in the juncture of the Greater China region and his Malay supremacy homeland, Ng Kim Chew seems to passively position himself at a doubly marginal site, also refusing to engage in any of the minority alliances. And what he connects himself with, and his stories about that period in history, is always the Chinese/Sinophone language and literature. At the same time, he also calls into question the concepts of language fetishisms and the fetishisms of China and Sinicism.

With all the materials that Prof. Yu and his Taiwanese researchers collect from their fieldtrip to Singapore, they manage to produce a circumstantial thesis titled *History of Everyday Life of the New Chinese Migrants in the Straits Colony, from 19th to 20th century*. Yet, Prof. Yu still fails to locate the legendary back-craving that Mr. Fu does on human bodies. In the mysterious ending, Prof. Yu is terribly engraved to death, with the word *hai* 海 (sea) all over his body and with only one different word, *xia* 下 (down), on the hollow side of his tailbone. Who killed Prof.

⁴¹ See, for example, the territory mapping of the Sinophone in the essay collection *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Shih Shu-mei, Chai Tsien-hsin and Brian Bernards. For more analysis and my critiques on the Sinophone theory, please see Chapter One.

Yu in such a cruel way? We are led to discover that Mr. Fu has a follower, who happens to be a Peranakan living next door to him, and who, according to Mr. Fu's wife, could be Mr. Fu's illegitimate son. Mysteriously, this Peranakan learns only one word from Mr. Fu throughout his lifetime, which is the word *hai* 海. In this appalling ending, Mr. Fu's skeleton rolls out from somewhere, having been engraved densely with words. However this time they are not *hai* 海, but unknown symbols—"maybe symbols older than words, likening to the tracks of birds and beasts" (359).

The motif of necrophilia is once again tackled here, yet the engraver here is neither a Chinese Malaysian (like the protagonist in "Fish Skeleton") nor a British personnel (like Mr. Fu), but a Peranakan Chinese. In my opinion, Ng wants to imply the identity crisis of the Peranakan community—Chinese in blood, British in culture—and he calls into question the problematic compartmentalization of "Chineseness" itself. In fact, since the independence of Malaya, the Peranakan has been forcibly categorized as "Chinese" in the racial quota, but whether in the language, culture or custom they have already undergone a creolization process with the natives and the British colonizers. In other words, under the exclusive ethnic division scheme, they are too Chinese for the Malays and too Malay for the Chinese. As a result, they have been facing

crisis and dilemma in the construction of their class or racial identity⁴². Many of the Peranakans do not understand the Chinese language, but are inevitably involved in the paradoxical discourse of Chineseness. Pushing Prof. Yu “*xia hai*” 下海 (down to the sea) and the engraving on Mr. Fu’s back is Ng’s staging of the Peranakan Revenge, which signifies the Peranakan’s resistance to succumbing to the ethnic division system, Chinese fetishisms and British colonialism.

In this regard, the symbol of “sea” is key to understanding Ng’s mapping of the South Seas (Nanyang), for the contemporary history of the region is the history of sea voyage—the colonial journey of conquest. The ancestors of many Chinese Malaysians, including Ng’s, also came to the settlers’ colony by the sea route. Symbolically, the Peranakan person pushes Prof. Yu down to the sea, meaning that he pushes the new Chinese immigrants back to their motherland through the South China Sea, and also sets the colonial masters back to their land⁴³. By means of this seemingly absurd drama of necrophilia, Ng Kim Chew does not intend to generate a nativist approach to understand the history of colonialism and migration. Instead, he endeavors to stage his mockery of the narcissistic nature of Malay nativism, Chinese essentialism and British colonialism, claiming that it will lead to nowhere except historical tragedy (or

⁴² Within this context, please see Celine Hung’s “*Hun xue (yu) hua mai luo zhong de huayu yuxi yanjiu*” 混血(語)化脈絡中的華語語系研究 for her discussion on the construction of Peranakan culture.

⁴³ The hard-to-pronounce surnames of the Chinese Malaysian characters in the story like *yu* 鬻 and *tiao* 糶 entail a similar meaning of “selling”. It is worth further exploration to see if Ng is implying that Chinese Malaysians sell their soul to the Mainland Chinese or Taiwanese cultural essentialism.

farce). The symbol of the sea is also Tash Aw's metaphor to reconstruct colonial discourse and various nation-building projects in Southeast Asia—the region's abbreviated name is SEA, coincidentally—and I will elaborate more on this in the later section.

The Nanyang Revolutionary Trilogy: Flesh and Blood in the Historical Site

In 2013, Ng Kim Chew published *Memorandum of the People's Republic of Nanyang* (henceforth *Memorandum*)—his first short-stories collection in 8 years. Following that, his creative imagination on the history of Malayan Communist Party (MCP) continued to flourish as he published another two similar collections—*As if Seeing Fuyu* in 2014 and *Fish* in 2015, completing his Nanyang Revolutionary Trilogy⁴⁴. Just as in his previous works, Ng never ceases to challenge and provoke taboos and mental limitations in fiction writing, and this time he attempts to subvert history in a playful, fictional manner. While living up to his nickname *enfant terrible*, Ng's playful and subversive narration of history in a postmodernist manner might give rise to anxiety among readers, especially those who pay high respect to "History", for instance the communists and realist camps. He is well aware of the fact that the ex-communists are very concerned about the objectiveness of historical appraisal in terms of their

⁴⁴ I am aware that Ng's *Huo, yu weixian shiwu* 火，與危險事物 (Fire, and Dangerous Things) was published in 2014 as his first ever story collection published in Malaysia, yet it is a self-selected collection that included many of his previous works and those already included in the three Taiwan-published collection, so I do not put this collection as one of his Nanyang Trilogy even though the stories are also about the Malayan communists.

struggles (Ng, *Memorandum* 10). However, he once summarized his writing stance on these seemingly “playful” works by quoting from the great Chinese writer Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書: “Though it seems to be a work of jokes, but is in effect a writing of anxiety” (雖玩笑之作，實憂患之書也). In other words, his sense of anxiety is shaped by the fact that “the curfew in [his] homeland is not yet lifted” (故鄉尚未解嚴), thus it is necessary for him to respond to the part of history by means of writing, and it is also a way to respond to himself as a diasporic figure (Ng “*hou ji*” 364). In the process, he maps out the Cold War geography in Asia, underlining the connection of the Chinese Left with communist China, Taiwan and Malaya, creating a fictional “Nanyang Republic” to deal with the problems in history.

Unlike his previous stories, in the Nanyang trilogy, Ng writes about the Malayan communists directly, probing into their psychosocial dimension *after* the communist war. In my opinion, this is the most valuable and distinctive part of Ng’s writing of the communists and leftists in a (post)modernist attempt, if one has to compare his writing intention with the realist and communist writers themselves. His portrayal of the communists always focus on the common human nature of the ex-communists and their lives as ordinary persons after the war, instead of the images of communist warriors on the battlefield. The latter is always seen in the works of ex-communist writers such as Jin Zhimang 金枝芒, He Jin 賀巾, A He 阿和, Li Ming 利明 and so on. To put it in another way, Ng has

no intention to write a “revolutionary literature”, nor has he tried to give new energy to a “leftist writing” tradition. Instead, he seeks to reconstruct a literary discourse *about* revolution and Chinese Malaysian. That is to say, his writing on the communists is a means to include their history of struggles into the literary history of Sinophone/Chinese Malaysian literature. And by doing so, he simultaneously calls into question the official and dominant narratives of the Malayan communists, while at the same time demonstrating that the Cold War still affects these people in contemporary times.

The history of Malayan communists has long been narrated by the colonial and state officials, especially in the archives of British colonizers. In their narratives, the communists were “terrorists” who gave rise to “insurgency” and later “escaped” to the Malayan jungle. After the Hatyai Peace Treaty was signed in 1989, the communists gave up armed struggles—some remained in Southern Thailand until today, some returned to Malaysia. Since 1990s, not a few ex-communist members started to write their memoirs on the jungle war, and the one that attracts most attention and discussion is undoubtedly the memoir of the last Secretary-General of MCP—Chin Peng’s *My Side of History* (2003). Malaysian historian Danny Wong Tze-ken believes that the publication of these MCP memoirs has at least provided two significant perspectives: first, it challenges the national narrative, claiming legitimacy for the MCP’s contribution to nation-building; second, it provides views “from the other side”, especially from the eyes and mouths of the MCP members, who vividly record their real struggles.

These views are important because they have long escaped the attention of both “the counter-insurgency agencies and scholars alike” (Wong D.T.K 89-90). More importantly, these memoirs allow us to pry into the “emotional dimension” of the MCP members, namely the genuine feelings and convictions of “flesh and blood” (99).

However, for Ng Kim Chew, historical narratives from any given side are partial and selective, and this applies to MCP memoirs as well. He calls into question the “realities” that have been published in both the state’s accounts and the ex-communists’ memoirs, arguing for the “fictionality” of the entire revolutionary history of the MCP. For example, in the story “Looking for My Dead Brother” 尋找亡兄, an ex-communist told the writer that

「你是寫小說的人怎麼也相信那種說法？...那些馬共回憶錄都是假的，該寫都沒寫。陳平《我方的歷史》更是漏洞百出，沒有幾個句子是可信的，讓洋鬼子幫他寫、用英文出版，是什麼意思？」接著他補充到：「我不用謊話連篇算是很客氣了。」（130）

“You are a fiction writer, how could you believe that kind of explanation? ...Those MCP memoirs are all fakes, what should have been written is not in there. Chin Peng’s *My Side of History* is even **full of loopholes**, not a single sentence is credible. What does he mean by letting the foreigners to write on his behalf? Even published in English?” He later adds that: “I am already being courteous when I refrain from calling it **a pack of lies**.” (Ng, *Memorandum* 130; emphasis original)

This is not the first time that Ng mocks a “mysterious” figure in history. In the 1990s he wrote about an influential Chinese writer, Yu Dafu 郁達夫, who came

to Nanyang in the 30s and disappeared in Indonesia during the Second World War⁴⁵. Ko Chia-cian rightly points out that Ng's intention of writing Yu Dafu in a playful and doubtful manner "is not directed against Yu Dafu himself, but pointing towards the fictionality of the entire literary discourse about Yu, which lacks flesh and blood in a mobile 'site' (*xianchang* 現場)" (Ko 114). Similarly, what Ng does in the Nanyang trilogy is not directed against Chin Peng or other MCP members, but it is his intention to question the historical "site" that is absent of "flesh and blood".

In other words, Ng Kim Chew observes the loopholes in History, as well as in the literary history and the communist writings, and he sees them as big gaps that need to be filled up with "context". What he does in the Nanyang trilogy is to supplement the stories of the Malayan communists with their "flesh and blood", and this fictional path will also manifest their psychosocial mental state after the "coming out" of the jungle, which is unseen in the memoirs or historical archives. In other words, he attempts to dig out another virtual historical site so that the living communist warriors can stand on the stage to tell their stories individually. Henceforth, s/he is no longer a mysterious "object" being written about, no longer a blurred face carrying a collective name—Malayan Communists—but one real, independent body with emotional feelings like every ordinary person. These characters walk out of the jungle after the

⁴⁵ For more analysis on Ng's narration on Yu Dafu, please see Groppe, Alison M. *Sinophone Malaysian Literature: Not Made in China*, Chapter 4.

revolution and start a journey of self-reflection. Some of them live happily, some remain melancholic until death, and some bear the guilt of betraying their comrades to death. For Ng, this is the on-site “flesh and blood” and “emotional dimension” that the entire discourse about the MCP lacks. To use Ng’s own words, he is of the view that

歷史原即是一樁收集、處理屍骸的活動。而在文字（精神）的背後終歸是血肉；文學、身體、文字與死亡——作為棺木的馬華文學史體制裝不下這一切——屍首並不經驗實證的在場。這筆遺產，只有文學，只有書寫才有可能承接。（〈境外中文〉103）。

history is originally an activity of collecting and processing the remains (corpses). Behind the text (mentality) is **always the flesh and blood after all**; literature, body, words and death—the system of Sinophone Malaysian literary history as a coffin is too small to fit them—the corpses do not experience an empirical presence. This legacy, can only be undertaken by literature, by writing. (Ng “Jingwai zhongwen” 103; emphasis original)

Metafiction and Metahistory

Ng’s questioning of the official history as well as of the MCP memoirs, I argue, might resonate with what Hayden White defines in his influential *Metahistory*, as he highlights that the idea of metahistory is a recognition of the “history work as...a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse” (White, *Metahistory* ix). In other words, the historian White and the writer Ng both juxtapose the historical and fictional narratives, reflecting on how both

narratives work within and around each other. White, in another essay, argues that

Historians are concerned with events which can be assigned to specific time-space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers—poets, novelists, playwrights—are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones...What should interest us...is the extent to which the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other. (White, "The Fictions" 121)

In other words, it is important to lay out the dialectical link of the historical and the fictional, underlining the fictionality of history and the historical consciousness in fiction. In addition to that, Ng Kim Chew also uses the technique of metafiction in his works to further make a claim about his process of writing fiction about the revolutionary history.

In what follows, I will examine his stories in the Nanyang trilogy for how he supplements the "emotional dimension" of the MCP's history—not through the genre of memoirs but fiction. This is done by his subversive playing about with "historical" facts and by his focus on individual stories of the ex-communists who continue to live their lives as ordinary people *after* the jungle war. Within this context, Sinophone/Chinese language and literature is still Ng's main mechanism to probe into the revolutionary history, as, in my opinion, his

endeavors to rewrite the revolutionary history is not done for the sake of the underrepresented ex-communists, but for the rewriting of Sinophone Malaysian literary history.

From *Memorandum* to *As if Seeing Fuyu* and later to *Fish*, each individual story seems independent but work in concert with one another intertextually. Moreover, they are also related closely to Ng's previous works, as the recurring motifs continue to manifest in every story in the trilogy. In "Memorandum of the People's Republic of Malaya", Ng delineates the story of a communist fighter Lao Jin who returns to his hometown after 40 years of struggles in the jungle. Since his return, he never contacts any of his comrades. Yet, after 15 years of living in his mother's house like a normal person, he is found dead and naked in a tree hole. As we know, Lao Jin has been facing mental problems since he walked out of the jungle, and during the 15 years he has been ceaselessly writing a novel titled "People's Republic of Nanyang".

（老金）彷彿浸泡在建國的歡悅裡，顛倒歷史、明暗互換，做好了人事布局，大致定好國家制度，沒收了外國資本家的產業（尤其是橡膠、油棕之類的大莊園、及錫礦）、也沒收了華人資本家的產業。（80）

(Lao Jin) seems to immerse himself in the pleasure of nation-building, as he subverts History, exchanging the bright and dark sides, making plans about the personnel arrangement, roughly setting up the state system, confiscating all the property of the foreign capitals (especially those big rubber and palm-oil plantation and the tin mines). He also confiscates the property of many Chinese capitalist businesses. (Ng, *Memorandum* 80)

Ng adopts Lao Jin's pen to subvert history, using fiction to reconstruct a historical site where Lao Jin can fill his imagination with a successful revolution to replace the failed one. This metafictional story is Ng's attempt to open a dialogical possibility of the text and the communist history in the present times, in order to "prevent [the past] from being conclusive and teleological" as suggested by Linda Hutcheon (Hutcheon, *A Poetics* 110). In another story "That Year I Returned to Malaya", we can again discover a more radical and complete version of subverted history.

The protagonist "I" is the son of an important past leader in the People's Republic of Malaya; his father has been put under house arrest due to his differing political ideas from the state's. In fact, his father is unsatisfied with the Republic's implementation of "Operation Coldstore" and "Great Migration"⁴⁶: Sending all the royal members in the Federated of Malay States to reform through labor in Siberia, deporting 4 million Malays to Indonesia in exchange for the 5 million Chinese located there. "I" returns to Malaya from Taiwan—which has already been "liberated" by the Mainland—after his father's death. And he is asked by his father's old comrade Dr. Chong to be in charge of the "Bumiputra

⁴⁶ In actuality, Operation Coldstore was a security operation launched by the Lee Kuan Yew government in Singapore on 2 February 1963, in which over hundred left-wing activists were arrested and detained without trial under Internal Security Act. The arrested activists included many key members of the opposition party Barisan Sosialis, one of them being Lee Kuan Yew's main opponent Lim Chin Siong. For more detailed and non-official information, see Poh Soo Kai, Tan Kok Fang & Hong Lysa (eds), *The 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore: Commemorating 50 Years*.

committee". However, the Republic is soon faced with the revenge of the Malays, and the entire Malaya is divided by the Pahang river into two camps in the south and the north—one controlled by the "People's Army" from the Republic, the other by the "Malay Army Consortium". The collapse of the Republic seems to be only in a matter of time.

The metafictional story in this work is *The Malayan Battles Saga* written by "I"'s father during his home arrest, but, miraculously, the entire piece engraved on a coffin board becomes the real history. In fact, the father had been sleeping in the coffin in his later years to carve words on the board, and this masterpiece predicts the decline and fall of the People's Republic of Malaya and the death of Dr. Chong. As Dr. Chong tells "I":

「你知道他寫什麼嗎？他寫我們國家的未來！而他寫的事，竟然一件一件的發生了。那些背叛、出賣、暗殺，馬來人的報復！」

「他寫到了自己的死，妻子的病，也寫到你的回來。」

「沒有希望的未來——也寫到了我的死！被暗殺！」他苦笑。(55)

"Do you know what has he written about? He wrote about the **future** of our nation! And all the events that he wrote actually happened one by one. Those events of betrayal, assassination, the revenge of the Malays!"

"He wrote about his own death, his wife's illness and your return."

"A future of no hope—he also wrote about my death! Assassinated!"

He smiled wryly. (Ng, *Memorandum* 55; emphasis original)

In the end, a magazine *Renmin Wenxue* 人民文學 (People's Literature) asks "I" to publish the posthumous works of his father, but "I" rejects their request. The

reason he gives is that “they are not literature, but history” (60). The father writes about the “future”, but the future has accurately become “history”. As can be seen, Ng calls into question the linear narrative of history, employing a metafictional mechanism to subvert our viewpoints about history, and to remind us to keep questioning how is history being “written”. Metafiction allows Ng to create fiction while at the same time “mak[ing] a statement about the creation of that fiction”; as Patricia Waugh delineates,

[t]he two processes are held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between “creation” and “criticism” and merges them into the concepts of “interpretation” and “deconstruction”. (Waugh, *Metafiction* 6)

To put it in another way, Ng uses metafiction to call into question the paradox of history being “written”, as he thinks it is in fact a process of creation and criticism not so different from fiction writing. In addition to negotiating between historicity and fictionality, the point of reference of his metafiction has extended to an intertextual connection of Ng’s previous works and, more significantly, the works of other important writers, especially those who became the leftists’ inspiration such as Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936) and Chen Ying-zhen 陳映真 (1937-).

Intertextual Cross-referencing: Mapping the Chinese Left in Nanyang

In his literary cartography project, Ng creates a fictional “Nanyang Republic” which maps out various communist linkages in Southeast Asia. And in this communist Utopia/Dystopia, it seems that all non-Chinese members are left out⁴⁷. The reason is that Ng’s project of narrating the communist history is largely informed by the history of the Chinese Left and the Chinese leftist literature. In other words, his historical narrative always showcases the dialectical process of the situation of Chinese Malaysians and their Chineseness—meaning that Ng is most concerned about the construction of identity of the Chinese Malaysians and their historical context.

Unlike Tash Aw who extends his concern to the Malay world, Ng is arguably more Chinese-centered. When he writes about the MCP, he does not intend to write about the revolutionary thoughts or class struggles, but the identity crisis that Chinese Malaysians have been facing in the national, cultural and linguistic terms—a “historical tragedy” 歷史悲劇 as he often claims (Ng *Fish* 318). He harbors a great suspicion over the legitimacy of “revolution”; as can be seen in his stories, revolution loses to human nature and ethnicity in the end. Hence, for him, the communist revolution is more a legacy of the Chinese Left and the Chinese leftist literature, spearheaded by Lu Xun, and in the Taiwanese counterpart, Chen Ying-zhen. Ng continuously uses their figures and their

⁴⁷ In fact, although Chinese are the majority in the MCP, the Malays, especially the rural Malays, also maintain a significant part in the party. See Mohamed Salleh Lamry “A History of the Tenth Regiment’s Struggles”.

literary works as intertextual references; some of his stories are even titled after works written by Lu and Chen. In an appendix in his latest collection *Fish* (2015), Ng notes that Sinophone Malaysian literature started in the early 20th century as a “Lu Xun legacy” (魯迅遺產). Inheriting social-realism from the most important modern Chinese writer, early Sinophone Malaysian writers were all readers of Lu Xun, upholding didacticism as their philosophy of writing and tending to produce a lot of *zawen* 雜文 (short essays) in response to burning social issues of the day (Ng *Fish* 310-11).

In the award-winning story “Blessing” (*zhufu* 祝福), which has the same title as an earlier Lu Xun story, Ng uses the point of view of a Mainland Chinese—the descendent of a *guiqiao* (歸僑, returned overseas Chinese)⁴⁸. She brings back her father’s ashes to his hometown in Taiping, Malaysia to meet the family of her father’s ex-lover, Aunt Lan, and their daughter (her half-sister). In this story, Ng maps out the route of the dissemination of the body and thoughts of the Chinese Left. Unlike his early works that dealt with the migration of Chinese diaspora from the Mainland to Nanyang, and from Nanyang to Taiwan, this story is arguably Ng’s first attempt to pin down his concern of the *guiqiao* and their “coming back” to the birth land Malaya. He highlights the unfamiliarity and awkwardness of the two parties manifested in the language—one speaks with “out-of-tune Nanyang *huayu*” (走音的南洋華語), another with “Mainland

⁴⁸ “Blessings” won The Year’s Best Story Award (103 年度小說獎) held by Chiu Ko Publisher (九歌出版社) in Taiwan.

accent *huayu*" (中國口音的華語) (Ng *Fish* 18; 30). The seemingly happy reunion is in fact awkward and uneasy, with both sides trying with great difficulty to understand each other. More interestingly, the name of the protagonist is "Xiao Nan" (Little South, 小南), which signifies her father's nostalgic longing to go back to his homeland Nanyang, while her half-sister is named "Xiao Hong" (Little Red, 小紅), which shows her mother Aunt Lan's yearning for reuniting with her revolutionary lover in Red China. This juxtaposition showcases the distorted identity that Chinese Malaysians have been facing, and the history of the Chinese Left has even complicated the relationship at a deeper level.

Intriguingly, during the Cultural Revolution, their father Ah Fa 阿發 is sent to be "re-educated" in a small village in Henan 河南 after his "return" to the motherland, and he falls in love with the place immediately and decides to stay there for the rest of his life simply because it is where the Oracle was first unearthed. He is excited as he finally comes to the site closest to the origin of Han culture (Ng *Fish* 31). As we can imagine, he soon starts engraving the poems of Mao Zedong and the works of Lu Xun on the turtle shells that he digs out from the earth. When Xiao Nan brings back these shells as gifts to the family of Aunt Lan, she finds that the husband of Aunt Lan—Ah Fu 阿福—is an accomplished imitator of Lu Xun's handwriting, and has sold many of his works to the Lu Xun museums in China and elsewhere, under the guise of being Lu's authentic works. In my opinion, Ah Fu is projected as an incarnation of Mr. Fu from the story

“Backcarving”, who imitates Chinese words as a hobby, while Ah Fa seems to be the professor in “Fish Skeleton” who engraves the Oracle on turtles. The common motifs of Ng’s story-writing, such as his critiques of language fetishism and Chinese essentialism, have been continuously drawn on in his works so far, and it is interesting that in the Nanyang trilogy he actually uses the history of the Chinese Left as a “backbone”. In addition to that, the origin of Chinese leftist literature as represented by Lu Xun formulates Ng’s main concern regarding the construction of Sinophone Malaysian literature.

In other words, Ng’s response to the “Lu Xun legacy” in Sinophone Malaysian literature can be seen in the portrayal of Ah Fu. The character imitates Lu Xun’s handwritings like a trickster and even writes Xiao Nan a revised version of Lu Xun’s poem with pornographic elements, showing that Ng plays with the symbol of Lu Xun to criticize the so-called “Lu Xun followers” in the literary field. In the same fashion as Ng does in his previous works, he calls into question the realist writers’ didacticism inherited from Lu Xun and seeks to subvert it by means of modernist aesthetics. He calls out for greater localisation and creativity from Sinophone Malaysian writers, as, in his view, the new generations should have long ago abandoned the legacy of Mainland Chinese literature.

Also, Ng’s similar intertextual practice can be seen in his usage of Chen Ying-zhen’s titles such as “*Shan Lu*” (山路 Mountain Path) and “*Qican de wuyan de zui*” (淒慘的無言的嘴 Miserable and Speechless Mouth) in the Nanyang

trilogy. He thinks that Chen's earlier works are the "benchmark of Leftist literature outside China" which, in my view, can also be seen as part of the "Lu Xun legacy" (Ng, *Memorandum* 12). Though he does not play with Chen Yingzhen the writer as a symbol, he imitates Chen's tone and plot in the story "Mountain Path" but does it in an oppositional political ideology. The elderly woman in Chen's story starves herself to death silently in the 1980s after she sees a piece of news in the newspaper—her leftist good friend who was betrayed by her brother during the White Terror has been granted amnesty⁴⁹. Since the imprisonment of this friend in 1950s, she has left home and has sacrificed herself to serve as atonement in the family of another leftist friend who had been persecuted. Living with guilt and political pressure for 30 years, the moment she sees the news, and as she writes her suicide notes, she is unable to ignore the truth that she has long put aside the socialist dream and has been living in the capitalist way that she once detested. For this reason, she can only resort to starving herself to death—a way that she believes allows her to possibly connect herself with the revolutionists.

However, in Ng's story, the elderly woman serves in the family of a victim who was killed by her communist lover in the most terrible way. She starves herself to death for the reason that she learns in the news that, ex-communists,

⁴⁹ White Terror was the period of martial law in Taiwan from 1949 to 1987; it was the suppression of political dissidents carried out by the Kuomintang government. Many were prosecuted under the label of "bandit spies" (匪諜), being charged with working as spies for the Chinese communists. Many intellectuals were also imprisoned for the reasons of resisting KMT rule or sympathizing with communism.

including her ex-lover, are returning to Malaysia after the signing of the Hatyai Peace Treaty. Here, Ng replaces Chen's story with a completely different ideology, the communist-turned-terrorist lover of the woman is Ng's way of characterizing another face of the communists, again with an ending that the revolution loses out to "human nature", to "flesh and blood". In Chapter Two I discuss Lim Choon Bee's examination of Li Zishu's story on the communists, in which she criticizes Li for not extending an emphatic understanding to the communists, which in turn might make her work complicit with anti-communist ideology deployed in state propaganda. In my opinion, Ng's fiction walks a thin line carefully between the two sides. On the one hand, he argues for complete freedom in creativity, in order to narrate the various faces of "human nature", including the dark sides of the communists, and which potentially works in tandem with the state's anti-communist ideology. On the other hand, he calls into question the absence of "flesh and blood" in the entire discourse on and of the MCP, proposing to probe into the psyche of MCP members as ordinary individuals especially after the Cold War, as resistance to the dominant narratives. Instead of arguing that Ng wants justice for the MCP members, I would say that his intention and point of departure is arguably set in rewriting the literary history of Sinophone Malaysian literature. As a whole, Ng's intertextual mapping empowers him to view the MCP revolution as a legacy of the Chinese Left and Chinese Leftist literature passing onto Sinophone Malaysian literature.

To sum up, maybe as a postscript, I believe that the investigation of cultural legacy cannot be managed in a simple, binary term, like abandoning the older traditions and moving to a new trend—an act of burning the plantation (*shao ba* 燒芭). It has to be perceived as a continuously contested site in which the traditions and new elements meet, converse, and negotiate. The controversies that *enfant terrible* Ng Kim Chew caused in the 1990s, and perhaps till now, are results of the cutting off of the continuity of cultural legacy in ways that Ng was advancing in a postmodernist approach. Thus the practice shocked the entire literary field, especially the writers of older generation. Ng's effort in spurring the progressive quality of Sinophone Malaysian literature, as can be seen in his excellent criticisms and fictions, is worth praising, yet, perhaps there is a need for reestablishing an emphatic link to the writers of the older generation, especially the leftist, realist writers whose names have been forgotten in contemporary times. As a matter of fact, their works also contribute to capturing the voices of marginality and portraying the identity dilemma of Chinese Malaysians during the historical period in question. To reimagine, as Ng does, the communist revolution extending successfully into our own era might also have to be carried out if we want to successfully grasp the history of the era in its own terms, when ideas like postmodernism had yet to appear, and academic discourse had yet to lose touch with culture on the ground.

Tash Aw and the de-Orientalized Mapping of Postcolonial Southeast Asia

Tash Aw, in comparison, is more concerned with the continuity of histories, as can be seen in this section. As compared with the Sinophone counterpart, who emphasizes the quest for a “Chinese” identity, Anglophone Malaysian writers, such as Tash Aw, are more concerned about the postcolonial situation in Southeast Asia. Born in Taipei to Malaysian parents, Aw moved back to Kuala Lumpur at the age of 3 and studied law at University of Cambridge after high school. Not too long after the graduation, he gave up his job in a law firm and was admitted to the creative writing program at the University of East Anglia. His first novel *The Harmony Silk Factory* (henceforth *Harmony*) published in 2005 was completed during his time at East Anglia, through which he won the Whitbread First Novel Award, Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Novel (Asia Pacific region) and was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize that year. This piece of work is set against the Second World War in Malaya, revisiting the interrelated power and relationships between the local Chinese community, British colonizers and Japanese imperialists. Yet, Aw’s adopts the narrative voice of a local perspective, and thus makes “an attempt to refresh and change the whole genre of the Second World War novel” (Tuffied n.p.). In an interview, Aw confesses that his intention of writing is to:

demolish the Malaysian historical novel of the 1930s and 40s, as influenced by Somerset Maugham...the idea that there are only two versions of Malaysia in literature: a place where white men sit

around drinking pink gin, and a place full of colorful people doing quaint things. (Morrison n.p.)

This is indeed an important and bold claim of a young writer, who is very determined to write a “de-Orientalized” postcolonial novel on his own. He further condemns Maugham’s stories for all being “incredibly bad”, “exactly the same” and highly “predictable” in exotic settings (Tuffield n.p.).

Consequently, *Harmony* lives up to Aw’s claim, for his multi-layered portrayal of the Chinese Malayan Johnny Lim leaves space for readers to piece together their various-sided understanding of Johnny—the reticent Chinese coolie-turned-merchant who happened to be a leader of the MCP. Johnny’s story is told by three narrators: his son Jasper Lim, his wife Snow and his best friend Peter Wormwood, and each of them gives inconsistent perspectives of Johnny’s character. Aw’s attempt to break through the official narrative is clear, for he juxtaposes the three incomplete versions of Johnny Lim to show that our understanding of History stems from a reliance on various external sources—on outsiders’ perspectives involving, say, the recollection of myths, the perusal of archives and access to the memories of other witnesses. In this historical project, Johnny himself is absent from the narratives, which is akin to the historical position of the MCP in state propaganda. As Aw himself states in the story, “the tale of History is most unreliable. It is, after all, reconstructed by human beings” (Aw, *Harmony* 155).

Working in tandem with Ng Kim Chew's adaptation of metahistory in his work, Aw also interweaves fiction and history to further underline the fictionality of history and the historical consciousness present in fiction. Similarly, they both endeavor to make a claim about the creation of fiction, and simultaneously question the process of history being "written". For example, Jasper's understanding of his father is not gathered through their physical interactions—as he has been keeping a distance from Johnny—but posthumously with "the help of books, official records, memoirs" (Aw, *Harmony* 113). He further claims that: "Only I among these people know the truth...I have history on my side" (113). The latter claim arguably works as an echo to Chin Peng's *My Side of History*, through which Aw casts his doubts on the one-sided narratives provided in official records, archives, history textbooks, and even memoirs. In this regard, Aw takes a similar stance that Ng has been advancing in his "historical" writing, as he calls into question the paradox of reducing history to archival records and memoirs but not infusing "flesh and blood" into it.

Through a Faulkerian narrative form, Aw reveals that the writing of history is selective and one-sided. For instance, although Jasper confidently claims that he is the only one who knew the truth, in the narrative of Snow and Peter in the later section we would discover that his "truth" is actually fabricated. He thinks that Snow's parents have forced her to marry Johnny, but in fact it is Snow herself who makes this decision. Moreover, he thinks Johnny "wanted to

be taken to the head of dreaded *Kempeitai*" (107), so that he can cooperate with the Japanese to gain power⁵⁰. Yet, we are told later that it is Kunichika the Japanese spy who threatens to reveal Johnny's communist identity and take away his wife if he does not cooperate (334). In this regard, Aw refuses to offer a single-sided narrative in recollecting history, in order to underscore the power/knowledge hidden behind every authoritative voice.

The history of pre- and post-independent Malaya during the 50s and 60s has been Aw's main concern, and he uses fiction to supplement the one-sided and biased official history deployed during the Cold War period. Aw's second novel *Map of the Invisible World* (henceforth *Map*) published in 2009 is a more direct response to nationalism and the Cold War ideology, in which he tackles the symbiotic links of the Malay world, as evident in his portrayal of the fraternity between two parted brothers. In the next section, I will examine how he uses *Map* to spatialize the historical landscape of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, as well as the way he showcases the inextricable link that tied Malaysia to the evolving histories of its neighbors in the region. Before I proceed to analyze *Map*, I wish to emphasize Tash Aw's literary cartography project, which positions the South Seas as the center in his fiction.

Aw places a spotlight on the region—the South Seas, or Southeast Asia, or Nanyang—and attempts to use his narrative mapping to delineate the contested

⁵⁰ "Kempeitai" was the military police of Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) from 1881 to 1945 that worked more like secret police, as similar to Gestapo of the Nazi army.

thoughts, political ideology and underlying power relations of the said region. He uses the metaphor of the “sea” to map out a de-Orientalized “positionality” on Southeast Asia in the history of colonialism, through which he insists on exposing the multiplicity of trajectories to undermine the relation of power/knowledge during the Cold War period. I will elaborate more on the metaphor of sea used in the final section. At this stage, I would like to focus on his method of spatializing the region to reimagine the nature of modernity and problems underlying the nationalist project. His point of departure, I argue, works in concert with Doreen Massey’s idea of “spatializing the history of modernity”, as she emphasizes the importance of decentering and displacing European parameters of capitalist modernity:

Spatializing that story enables an understanding of its **positionality**, its geographical embeddedness; an understanding of the spatiality of the production of knowledge itself....It has not left the story the same. (Massey 63-4; my emphasis)

In other words, Aw’s narrative mapping looks into the roots of power/knowledge relations and sees space as an ongoing project that is constantly tackling multiple dimensions but that also at the same time focalizes a positionality on the space itself. In this process, Aw’s story maps out the contested thoughts and ideology that define the space itself. His fiction seeks to tell a story of the Cold War by positioning a Southeast Asian spatiotemporality.

On the one hand, he de-Orientalizes Cold War history (temporal), which heavily focuses on Western-Soviet rivalries; and on the other hand, he stages the dispersed peripheries (spatial), which are often “invisible” in the dominant, hegemonic framework. Aw’s title, “Map of the Invisible World” allows marginalised perspectives to gain an airing.

In mapping the network relations in Southeast Asia, he offers an alternative to the colonial myth of spatial order as well as underscoring the broken fraternity between Indonesia and Malaysia due to the effects of the Cold War. Similar to Ng’s approach, which maps out the literary link of Nanyang and China, Aw draws on the fluid and symbiotic history of Malaysia, Indonesia and China in his fiction, which creates what Homi Bhabha calls a hybrid “Third Space” as an alternative. By spatializing a marginal location, such as the South Seas, one arguably “overcomes the given ground of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity” (Bhabha 25). More importantly, the interrogation of this “Third Space” will overcome the binary oppositions between the colonizer and the colonized, creating a third alternative that symbolizes “a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*” (25, emphasis original). In other words, Aw envisions a new form of spatial identity that breaks away from the binary postcolonial imaginations between the imperialists and nationalists. Instead, he endeavors to reexamine the spatial politics that encapsulate an abstract conceptual “Third Space”, in which contested thoughts and ideologies are to be tackled. Given the above, we might

say that Aw and Ng project similar kinds of imaginaries onto the same region—the South Seas, extending its connectivity towards the neighboring areas that share a common culture as part of their literary cartography project.

Tash Aw has been paying more attention to the connecting histories in the region, as can be seen in the diverse background setting used in his three novels. Following the sequence of his works and their embedded motifs, I will show that he strives to draw a map that sets out from Malaysia, in search of shared and symbiotic relationship and histories with its neighbors. In *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), he unravels the muted histories from the legacy of Orientalized narratives, positioning a locality in understanding postwar Malaya and the MCP. Then, *Map of the Invisible World* (2009) continues these motifs but brings us to Indonesia in 1960s, when a new nation-state “Malaysia” was about to be established in the shadow of Cold War ideology. Following that, the newest novel *Five Star Billionaire* (2013) leads us to postsocialist China in 2008, where five Chinese Malaysians “return” to their supposedly “ancestral land” to participate in the largest economy in the world. By spatializing the region, Aw breaks through the boundaries of national histories and further calls into question the capitalist modernity project in the region.

At the same time, Tash Aw was the first Anglophone Malaysian writer whose fiction was translated into Chinese and published in Taiwan, thus making his work available to many Chinese readers in Malaysia and elsewhere. Even though one of Shirley Lim Geok-lin’s works has been translated and published

in Taiwan in 2001, intriguingly it was only her memoir *Among the White Moon Faces* but not her fiction and poetry. It seems that Shirley Lim's Asian American identity is more appealing to the Taiwanese readers than her literary works about Malaysia. This makes Aw the first Anglophone Malaysian writer to enter Chinese readership as a fiction writer. All his three novels have been translated into Chinese, and he personally attended the book launches in Taiwan⁵¹. As can be seen, Taiwan becomes an important medium for Sinophone and Anglophone writers to meet one another, and Aw not only promotes an understanding of the connecting histories in Asia, but also sets an example to underscore the importance of interaction and communication in the literary field of different languages. This is an important step that has broken the language barrier in Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian literary sphere⁵².

In what follows, I will examine *Map* and draw on the *Konfrontasi* period as part of the history that constitutes an important chapter of the global 1960s⁵³. This time, Aw does not set out to narrate the story from the Malaysian perspective. Instead, he hands the right to speech to Indonesia as the characters undergo the turbulent period in Indonesia. In this way, Aw is arguably

⁵¹ In this year 2015, Tan Twan Eng's second novel *The Garden of Evening Mists* was also published in Taiwan, after his winning of the Man Asian Literary Prize 2013.

⁵² For the phenomenon of lacking mutual translations and understandings between the two linguistic spheres in Malaysia, please see my discussion in Chapter One.

⁵³ *Konfrontasi* (the Indonesia-Malaysian Confrontation) was a violent conflict in 1963-66 spurred by Indonesian's opposition to the creation of the new nation-state Malaysia (inclusive of Peninsular Malaya, Sarawak, Sabah [North Borneo] and Singapore); the campaign was generated by the then Indonesian President Sukarno. For more in-depth analysis on this incident please see J.A.C. Mackie. *Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute 1963-1966*.

determined to investigate this historical period from another perspective, attempting to remind us that the creation of the nation-state Malaysia was not a natural process. Rather, we have to revisit the period with its Cold War background in Southeast Asia and link it to the global 60s when the civil rights movements all around the world fermented the third-world decolonial movements.

Cold War and the Global Sixties

The story of *Map* starts in Indonesia around the year 1964, when the protagonist Adam sees his foster father Karl de Willigen being remanded by the armed forces. Adam and his elder brother Johan grow up together in an orphanage; his brother is adopted by a Malaysian couple when Adam is five, and he is later adopted by Karl and lives with him on an island called Nusa Perdo, in West Nusa Tenggara. Karl is a Dutch painter who has stayed in Indonesia after independence and has obtained Indonesian citizenship. Due to his resentment over colonialism and racism, he has wanted to integrate wholeheartedly into the local community and live a simple life like them. After Karl's arrest, Adam finds his way to Jakarta to look for help from Margaret Bates, an American anthropologist and also Karl's former lover. At Margaret's office, he gets to know her research assistant Din (Maluddin Saidi), an Indonesian student who has given up his postgraduate studies in Holland due to the racist sentiments he received there. Without Margaret's knowledge, Din has already become a radical political enthusiast in Jakarta. He infuses Adam with a lot of anticolonial and

anti-Western thoughts, and in the end he even attempts to use Adam as a scapegoat by trying to persuade him to carrying out the bomb assassination of President Sukarno.

Adam arrives at Jakarta at the brink of civil war when different political forces and ideologies are in contention, in which he is caught in the political torrent. Besides, various political movements around the world and the region have also ignited the local situation. Tash Aw relates Indonesia in 1960s to the global situation, as can be seen in the narratives of political events that happened simultaneously:

More protests in Europe against the imprisonment of Mandela. Sukarno condemns Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Abebe Bikila promises gold for Africa. Brezhnev to provide more aid for Indonesia. Drug use in Malaysia reaching epidemic proportions; Britain offers no help. Communists arrested in outlying islands. (Aw, *Map* 30)

In this paragraph, the novel implies that there are several different political ideologies raised around the Indonesian territory, and this is highly related to Karl's arrest. Sukarno strongly opposes American Imperialism, as we can see from the news described above, and the Communist Party leader Brezhnev of the Soviet Union supports Sukarno by supplying more aid. However, in the outer islands of Indonesia, such as the island Adam and Karl live, the communists are arrested. Karl's arrest is arguably related to Sukarno's xenophobic policies as the

president aims at deporting all the remaining Dutch in the country. Yet, Karl is in fact arrested by the anti-communist armed forces, which proves that the political situation in the outlying islands is out of control of Sukarno. Through hindsight, we know that in one year's time the regime of Sukarno will be overturned by a military coup d'état headed by Suharto, whose dictatorship ended only in 1998. During the period that Suharto seized power, an anti-communist genocide was carried out in 1965-66, in which more than 500,000 people were killed⁵⁴.

Tash Aw sets his story in a turbulent period to portray the political upheaval of Indonesia in the face of various internal ideological conflicts, as well as the external political struggles to oppose the blueprint of a Greater Malaysia. He draws us back to the crucial period when the nation-state Malaysia had just been created few years after the end of Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and the MCP launched a guerilla war in the jungle. In Chapter Three, I have shown that Chang Kuei-hsin's *Elephants* depicts the Sarawak communists' guerilla warfare in Borneo jungle, which received the aid of Sukarno's government. It is in this period that Sukarno's *Konfrontasi* campaign was fermented in collaboration with

⁵⁴ There are not many in-depth monographs that work on the Indonesia killings, an important contribution was the Indonesian political scholar-activist Hilmar Farid's journal article "Indonesia's Original Sin: Mass Killings and Capitalist Expansion, 1965-66" published in 2005, forty years after the killings, in which he argues that there was a direct causal link between the massacre and the expansion of capitalism in Indonesia. Farid's article has received wide responses yet much detail is still need to investigate the event carefully, which prompted the journal to publish another special issue in 2015, fifty years after the killings, in response to Farid's article. See Chua Beng Huat "Editorial Introduction" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16.2(2015), 289-291.

communist fighters in Borneo, to fight against the conspiracy plot of the government of Malaya and the British colonizers who intended to draw upon anti-communist containment plan through “Malaysia”. Sukarno believed that

Malaysia was merely a ramshackle **neo-colonialist** creation of the British and that it would fall apart under the strain of confrontation...[It is a] neo-colonialist puppet regime imposed upon the people against their will” (Mackie 8-9; my emphasis).

Thus, Indonesia began the *Konfrontasi* campaign against Malaysia, in spite of the fact that its internal opposing voices has been restlessly waiting for a chance to seize power. As can be seen, *Map* is not a simple postcolonial story like some book reviewers perceive, as it is certainly not a story about “1960s Indonesia and Malaysia, the two countries struggling with independence, fighting the communists and each other” (Sardar n.p.). It is easy to label a Malaysian novel as “postcolonial” by taking it as a story about local nationalists fighting against the colonial imperialism and communist power and nothing much else. In fact, Indonesia and Malaya had already declared independence in 1945 and 1957 respectively, and *Map* appears to be a much deeper examination on the post-independence period, in which the Cold War played an important role. What Aw wants to highlight in this story, I argue, is the possible return of a neo-colonialist plot as in the creation of Malaysia, and the different fates of the communists in various places of Southeast Asia.

Thus, Ziauddin Sardar's review manifests a typical western view of the postcolonial history in Southeast Asia, echoing Frederic Jameson's infamous claim that all Third-World Literature are "necessarily...national allegories" (Jameson "Third-World Literature" 69). His observance reveals the postcolonial binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonized, in which the contested spatial politics are largely neglected. It might be true that *Harmony* reveals a postcolonial story that involves nationalists' struggles for independence, however, in *Map*, Tash Aw is more eager to capture the subtle and complicated neo-colonialist plot in the post-independence period, especially in the face of Cold War ideology. It seeks to change, or overturn, as Bhabha says, "the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics" (Bhabha 25). And this investigation cannot be complete without probing into the Cold War ideology in the global 60s, and the rejuvenation of the repressed historical memory in the Cold War era, such as the *Konfrontasi* and the mass killings.

In dealing with the Cold War situation, Aw juxtaposes two binary oppositions as manifested in the American diplomats and the Indonesian nationalists, and seeks to create what Homi Bhabha calls the "Third Space" to open up a fluid conceptual space for examination. The interrogation of the postcolonial situation, as well as the Cold War ideology, can never be executed in a binary opposition, but through an alternative space in which all contested thoughts manifest as a form of spatial politics. In the story, Margaret seeks the help of her fellow American expats Bill Sneider, who works as diplomat at the

Embassy, in the hope that he will save Karl. But Bill requires Margaret to reveal the names of student communists in her university in return. Moreover, he wants Margaret to pay a visit to President Sukarno, who has been deporting Western expats, to give him a masterpiece painting of the Indonesian painter Raden Saleh as a token of friendship from the American government to Indonesia. In the logic of American politics during the Cold War, Bill said:

“The idea is simple: we arrange for the return of this priceless, hugely symbolic nationalistic work of art to Indonesia, and in return he recognizes that we’re good friends of his, not enemies...The only way to get him on our side again is to appeal to his human instincts, to touch a chord”. (*Map* 278-80)

We can see that in the logic of containment, the United States makes efforts to include Indonesia in their territory of defense. However, Sukarno openly states that the communists are his fellow revolutionaries, and he has become increasingly pro-Soviet and China, which upsets the balance he has once tried to hold in the non-alignment movement. Moreover, he rejects the painting of Raden Saleh as a gift from America, as he said the painting already belonged to Indonesia (292). In other words, Sukarno again refuses to let Indonesian culture be appropriated by neo-colonialism in another American Cold War plot.. *Map* reminds us that the Cold War has had direct effects on Southeast Asia, and even to the point of causing two brother countries, Indonesia and Malaysia, to fight against each other.

On the other hand, Aw also offers an opposite nativist point of view in response to the American containment. Din represents the radical nationalist who wants to rewrite the history of Indonesia, as he said

“My idea was that we needed a history of our country written by an Indonesian, something that explored non-standard sources that Westerners could not easily reach. Like folk stories, local mythology, or ancient manuscripts written on palm leaves...When you think about the standard approach to history, all the historical texts, you’re really talking about Western sources. It’s as if the history of South-East Asia started with the discovery of the sea routes from Europe to Asia...For three hundred years, someone else has written our history books for us, but now we have to re-write them” (*Map* 23;115).

Din is looking for the “essential” Indonesia in the form of local mythology or oral literature when words had not even existed, an act similar to the Oracle-seeking protagonist in Ng Kim Chew’s story. Their essentialist quest seems untimely and exclusive, as they ignore the accumulation of cultural varieties along the journey of history. Aw juxtaposes Bill’s imperialist statement with Din’s nationalist sentiments to showcase the danger of conceptualising colonial desires and cultural essentialism in binarism. Often in a binary opposition, many marginal groups in the economic or cultural sector are left out. For example, when Adam is in Nusa Perdo, he is also called a “foreigner” because of Karl’s Dutch identity. There is also one Madurese girl, who saves him from the other boys, who comes from an outlying island called Madura. Her family moves to Nusa Perdo because

of the “transmigration” project that the government has been advancing, however jobs are still scarce on the island and her family ends up disappearing again. To protect Adam, the girl, whose name is Neng, fights fiercely with the other boys, who call the Madurese “big-time trouble” (39). One of them said:

“I don’t care...These bloody foreigners, they come here and all they do is cause trouble, taking our land. They’re going to chase us off our own island soon, there’ll be nothing left for us. There’ll be more of them than us!” (Map 39)

From the paragraph, we can see that the xenophobic expressions of the kids are almost the same as Din’s nativist discourse. This inevitably makes us think about what exactly is “essential” and “native”? Din believes it is a journey to revive the ancient myths and oral literature to make them into the “real” Indonesian history, yet the nation-state Indonesia is in fact a postwar production even though her name was coined in the 18th century. It is doubtful whether the people in the outlying islands naturally recognize the nation-state Indonesia, given that Indonesia has over ten thousand islands and a significant diversity of major cultures and languages. If, as Din claims, the ancient histories of these islands constitute the essentiality of Indonesia, then it is ironic that in contemporary times the cultural and economic developments in these outer islands are by far the most marginalized. Hence, it is almost impossible to search for a cultural

heritage that is not shared symbiotically beyond the ideas of borders in the pre-independence era.

In Southeast Asia, the cultural space is a symbiotic asset before the actualization of nation-state system, especially in the case of Malaysia and Indonesia, who share the Malay culture. In this regard, Aw uses Din to represent the paradox of a radical “insiderist” account, as the dissection of cultures in binary forms will do no good in bringing about an understanding of symbiotic, pre-independence history. When nationalists like Din are opposed to the establishment of Malaysia in 1960s, they might also have to think about the problematic formation of every nation-state in Southeast Asia as not being naturally inherited. In this way, Aw’s story of Adam and Johan—the brothers separated by the nation-state and the surrounding seas—enables us to extend our reflection on the deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari’s term) of a cultural space, in which their transnational fraternity reformulates the orthodoxy that ties one culture to one place. In other words, it is important to rethink the boundaries set in cultural terms (such as the Malay cultures that the region shared), as much as they are imagined in political-economic terms (as in the nation-state system). In order to tackle the issue, Aw cleverly uses the descriptions of the sea to facilitate his creation of a Third Space, one that traverses the binary boundaries and works towards a symbiotic culture.

The sea is the metaphor that Aw employs to invoke the feeling of beauty and fraternity, as well as feelings of darkness and separation. In addition to that, the sea, on one hand, is an abbreviation of Southeast Asia (SEA) and it connects the region and the history that they share. On the other hand it is also the boundary that separates Adam and Johan in two countries. Furthermore, the symbol of “sea” is also used by Ng Kim Chew in “Back-craving” to project the history of sea voyages—the colonial conquest and the journey of Chinese diaspora. In my opinion, the symbolic meaning of the sea used by both writers is at least twofold: first, it serves as criticism of the colonial power/knowledge, such as in the portrayal of the skeleton of Mr. Fu in “Backcarving”, and in Aw’s de-Orientalized narratives; secondly, it emphasizes the connectivity and shared history of Southeast Asia, or the South Seas, which contributes to a common culture.

In *Map*, Johan is adopted by a rich Malaysian couple and has since stayed with his half-siblings in Kuala Lumpur, but the nightmare of leaving Adam never stops entangling him. Adam lives with Karl in Nusa Perdo, but since a very young age it is clear that both he and his father came from two different worlds. The two brothers are separated by destiny, till the end of the novel they have never met each other. It is not difficult to relate Adam and Johan as the symbolic representation of Indonesia and Malaysia—both have the same blood, culture and language but end up going down different paths. In the Indonesian

language, the word “*serumpun*” (cognition) is often used to describe the intimate relationship of the two parties, which refers to their “blood brotherhood”⁵⁵.

By means of fiction, Aw reflects upon the fraternity of the two countries, two brothers, and more importantly, the “structure of feeling” (Williams’ term) that is shaped by history, politics and culture. He seeks to connect a “common culture” that is shared in the pluralist Nusantara. In this regard, he uses the aesthetical, lyrical portrayal of the sea to rethink the connection, inclusivity and symbiosis of the region. Literary critic Sim Wai Chew has rightly pointed out that Aw in fact uses “an aesthetic mode to further its ethico-political ends” (Sim “History and Narrative” 306). And the sublimity that he captures “prefigures the historical domain in a potentially progressive or radical manner, concentrating in the process on important anti-colonial and revolutionary contexts” (296). In other words, the portrayal of the sea evokes the feeling of sublime, and this feeling is in fact aesthetical *and* political. In the paragraphs that follow, I will use excerpts that depict the scenes where Adam encounters the sublimity of the sea, and explore how the sublime manages to conjoin the aesthetical and political. Furthermore, I will examine how the sea symbolizes the Third Space that Aw attempts to create in order to connect the spatial history of Southeast Asia.

When living with Karl in Nusa Perdo since the age of five, Adam knows that he is different from Karl even though his foster father is exceptionally gentle

⁵⁵ For more in-depth analysis on the historical and political relations of Malaysia and Indonesia, see Joseph C.Y Liow. *The Politics of Indonesia-Malaysia Relations: One Kin, Two Nations*.

and caring towards him. One day when he is 13, he suddenly feels agitated and irritated by many tiny things: the meowing of cat, the pinky-whiteness of Karl's skin, his mumblings, and his classic music and so on, so Adam runs away from home and "[decides] he would look for his mother" (*Map* 72-3). Adam heads for the sea, immersing himself into its soothing breeze. He "[climbers] over the rocks and [makes] his way as far up the shoreline as possible until even the faintest strains of Karl's dying heroines [are] drowned out by the hush of the waves" (73). The sea breeze blows over Adam, and he suddenly realizes that he is an orphan. After coming home, for the first time, he asks Karl about his family but receives no exact details. In another scene, Adam looks up Margaret for her help to save Karl, but Din brings him to the downtown of Jakarta to witness the demonstration against Malaysia and Sukarno's speech. When he listens to the cry in the crowd, the roar sounds sharply like "a sudden squall out at sea", which leaves him breathless. He thinks that he is going to die, alone, "in this sea of skin" (157). Towards the end of the novel, we know that Adam's feeling towards the sea is in fact shaped by the last night he and Johan spent at the seafront behind the orphanage. They imagine their new life somewhere on the other side of the sea, as Adam thinks that both of them will be adopted by the same family.

Johan put his arm around Adam's shoulders. "We've done it. We always said we would see the sea one day. Together."

Adam nodded. He pulled at Johan's arm and Johan felt how small his hand was. "On the other side of the sea," Adam whispered, "is that our new home?"

Johan did not answer.

"Our new home is far away, I guess," said Adam, "all the way over there."

"Yes," said Johan at last. "Somewhere over there."

"Really?...We won't be able to see the orphanage from over there, will we?"

"I don't suppose so. The sea is very wide."

"I don't think I like it. The sea, I mean. It frightens me." (334)

At that time, Johan already knows that the Malaysian couple will take only one of them and separate them forever. Adam thinks he will leave the orphanage with his brother, and lead a new life "on the other side of the sea", but he only finds out the next day that it is Johan alone who is adopted. At night, Johan asks Adam to go back before him, as he wants to stay alone by the sea. When Adam leaves and, changing his mind, goes back to look for Johan, he spots him walking straight out towards the sea, "wading in the shallows, the water up to his calves" (336). The fact is that Johan wants to drown himself so that the adopters can choose Adam and bring him to a new life.

The portrayal of the sea as sublime manifests its positive as well as negative features: on the one hand it evokes the feeling of beauty, soothingness, home and fraternity; on the other hand it brings the sense of fear, darkness, power and division. Moreover, the sea is the waters that connect Southeast Asia on one hand, yet it is also the route that the colonial powers have taken to

conquer the region, on the other. These various terms of expressions that we associate with the sublime formulate the creation of a Third Space, one that Aw endeavors to use to intervene in the binary oppositions between the imperialist and nationalist discourse, as well as between the outsiderist and nativist account. This Third Space, I argue, is facilitated in the novel as the metaphor of the sea, and also works as a pointer to SEA (Southeast Asia), which eludes the politics of polarity and highlights connectivity. As Bhabha stresses, the enunciation of a Third Space “makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process”, in which the cultural knowledge “is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code” but not as a “homogenizing, unifying force” as those “kept alive in the national tradition of the People” (Bhabha 37). In other words, the description of the sea in the novel functions as a resistance to binary perceptions built up in the course of nation-building, and behind this aesthetical mechanism is Aw’s political inquiry into the Cold War situation.

As a whole, Aw’s literary cartography project endeavors to map an interactive social space in Southeast Asia, or the South Seas, which has long been seen as an “invisible world”. It is invisible in the eyes of Orientalism, which sees this part of the world as the “East”, a situation which vindicates Aw’s criticism of Maugham’s stories and other colonial knowledge. Yet, this world is also invisible in the eyes of nationalist inhabitants who view it in a Western modular form of a “nation-state”—in what is effectively a form of neo-colonial knowledge. An example can be seen in the case of Din, and the Malaysian ruling

elites who collaborate with the colonial power to come up with the idea of a Greater Malaysia—one that has forsaken its shared, symbiotic history and worked in tandem with Cold War ideology. By creating a Third Space for discussion, he maps out the social space of Southeast Asia, which stresses a non-monolithic yet non-binary understanding of the history of the region. In this regard, it is hopeful that the invisible world can manifest itself as a historical, political and cultural asset to be given weight to.

Summary: Literary Mapping as method

In this chapter, I compare Sinophone writer Ng Kim Chew and Anglophone writer Tash Aw in terms of their narrative mapping of the same region—the South Seas, or Southeast Asia, or Nanyang. Their way of spatializing the regional history opens up the transnational discussion on the shared cultural history, and works towards releasing the repressed memory of the Cold War residues. Ng Kim Chew, in his fiction and literary criticism, continues to write about the Malayan Communist Party as part of the memories of Chinese Malaysians. He creates a fictional Nanyang to illustrate the mobility and fluidity of the Chinese diaspora, mapping the dissemination of the Chinese leftist revolution in conjunction with the Chinese leftist literature spearheaded by Lu Xun. By means of metafiction, Ng supplements the MCP revolution with “flesh and blood”, and connects it with the legacy of Chinese leftist literature. On the other hand, the Anglophone writer Tash Aw uses the metaphor of the sea to

explore the broken fraternity between Indonesia and Malaysia in the course of the Cold War. He creates a fictional Third Space to draw up the symbiotic history and common culture of the region, as resistance to the binary discourses manifested in the Cold War nation-building. Both writers use a cartographic method to create a fictional space which points to the same region, allowing a more fluid and mobile history to be read as an important asset of regional history.

Chapter Five: Reconsidering *Adat*, Modernity and Distribution

Memory Recollections in Chuah Guat Eng's Malaysian novels and Au Sow-yee's "Mengkerang" project

In the previous chapters I covered six authors whose works point out Cold War residues in contemporary Malaysia, and who weave their fictional narratives into an important historical period. In each chapter, I compared the authors' Sinophone and Anglophone articulations in terms of their narration of the structures of feeling operating in the (post) Cold War era, and have shown their efforts to imagine a national identity relevant to a postcolonial, modern Malay(si)a. This final chapter, additionally, deals with mnemonic articulations in cultural production—the literary and the cinematic—that work towards the construction of an "imagined community" (Anderson). The artists under discussion are Anglophone writer Chuah Guat Eng and Sinophone filmmaker Au Sow-yee.

By choosing a filmmaker in this literary project, I tend to view her films as fictive texts. Au tells a story of an imagined nation "Mengkerang", and the story is narrated by different characters. I examine the texts as my main source, without laying too much emphasis on the image formulation. Moreover, what concerns me is the fictionalized account of narrating an imagined community in her project, which I think justify why it can stand under the umbrella of "literature" in this dissertation.

This chapter chooses the mentioned artists with the intention of paying special emphasis to “commonalities” or “common culture” captured in their works, in which due weight is given to contemplating complex issues affecting different communities in Malaysia. They do not give a one-sided account of the social dynamic—such as the overemphasis on ethnicity—but instead, endeavour to break the ethnic barrier through providing a “helicopter” view of the political and cultural arena in Malaysia while highlighting the psychosocial dimensions of individuals. They extend an in-depth examination of the politics of memory embedded in the imaginings of nation-building.

Chuah Guat Eng self-consciously wrote two “Malaysian novel[s]”, as her subtitles suggest, making clear that she attaches a nation-state-based point of departure in order to confront conflicts affecting contemporary Malaysia, structurally and historically. Au Sow-yee, from another perspective, generates an imaginative situation/place “Mengkerang”—a place/nation/community that is nowhere to be found in reality. Her experimental images are “archival” footages which project an imagined utopia “Mengkerang”, one that responds to the current situation in Malaysia. Despite the fact that their background and approach are different, Chuah and Au, I contend, both explore possibilities for the growth of a common culture in Malaysia, one that is shaped by different cultures and *adat* (custom), by modernity and by social distributive principles. Furthermore, they facilitate the politics of memory in order to examine the

limitation of the dominant, hegemonic discourse, and to offer an alternative counterdiscourse.

Intentionally, this chapter is conceptualized as the closing chapter of my dissertation. It highlights the works of Chuah Guat Eng—a self-published female novelist based in Malaysia—and Au Sow-yee—a young experimental filmmaker currently studying in Taiwan—for they undertake what Anthony Giddens calls a “reflexive modernity” project, in which one steers one’s own middle course “between the threats and the promises” of modernity (Giddens and Pierson 19). In view of this, this closing chapter aims to showcase the artists’ active participation in mapping the aesthetic (the lyrical touch that evokes pathos) and the political (the socio-historical-laden background).

In what follows, I will provide a quick summary of *Echoes of Silence* (henceforth *Echoes*), Chuah’s first novel, focusing on its point of departure as a post-1969 crime fiction relatively different from the post-1969 works that I examined in Chapter Two—where I discussed Li Zishu’s and Preeta Samarasan’s narrative methods and concerns. Following that, I turn to look at its sequel *Days of Change* (henceforth *Days*) in which the complicated notion of social justice is further developed through narration of the intersections of Malay *adat* and social modernity in the post-Cold-War 1990s. In the second part of this chapter, I will examine Au Sow-yee’s experimental film project to probe into her imagined community of “Mengkerang”, one that is constructed through archival footages and the use of minority voices. I argue that the works of Chuah and Au can be

read as “memory texts”, that is, as texts that summon the collective memories and memory-dependent knowledge of Malaysian cultural heritage and reality. And their modes of analysis in the literary and cinematic forms are ones that “the dominant protocols of knowledge and reasoning have no access” to (Nandy “Memory Work” n.p.). In other words, these memories are not those recorded and certified in textual form by authoritative or respectable “Culture”. Instead, they belong to individuals who possess the original mnemocultural forms.

Overcoming the Post-1969 Paradigm: Redistributive Concerns and National Literatures⁵⁶

Chuah Guat Eng was born in 1943 in Rembau, a small town in Negeri Sembilan, to English-educated parents. Although she read English literature at University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur and German literature at Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich, most of Chuah’s working life had been spent within corporate enterprises. She did not publish her first novel until 1994, when, in her 50s, she became the first female English-language novelist in the country with the publication of *Echoes of Silence* (henceforth *Echoes*). To embark on her literary career, she could only resort to self-publishing because, in 1994, local publishers were not interested in full-length novels while foreign publishers

⁵⁶ Please see Chapter 2 for my explanations of the post-1969 paradigm.

wanted to change her story “in order to appeal to western readers” —in her own words, as an act of “self-exotici[zation]” (Sim and Chuah 51).

If we can still recall the Indian poet Makarand Paranjape’s trenchant criticism of the dominant protocols in postcolonial studies for favouring diasporic writers instead of the home-based ones, we can see Chuah’s motivation and self-positioning as a critical counterdiscourse to the entire postcolonial scholarship, as well as to the Malaysian literary sphere. As a matter of fact, regrettably, Chuah is far less well-known compared to some of her other literary counterparts, despite the fact that her fiction works attentively to foster a comprehensive and organic understanding of multicultural Malaysia. She seeks to unfold social realities and to contribute towards the building of a common culture in Malaysia, where she sees successful literary narration as one that promotes a “healthy process of negotiating concepts of social integration” (Chuah “Strangers” 21).

In order to do so, she offers a fresh approach to managing narrative form and narrating voice. *Echoes of Silence* uses the genre of crime fiction to reveal a post-1969 motif of truth, love, and silence, while in her second novel *Days of Change*—a sequel to *Echoes* published 16 years later—Chuah adopts the voice of a middle class Malay man, Hafiz, to deepen the motifs in the prequel and to further deal with the moral and social dilemma faced by Malaysians in the period of the 1997 financial crisis. She leads us to reconsider the imbrications of *adat* (custom), modernity, development, nationalism, justice and gender through the

mnemonic accounts of the protagonist Hafiz, which function as a redemptive device for him.

To start with, *Echoes* is told by Ai Lian, a Chinese Malaysian who leaves the country soon after the May 1969 racial riots to find a “safe, orderly, predictable place to live in” (5). Nevertheless, in the 1970s, she meets Malaysian-born Briton Michael Templeton in Germany and soon decides to come back to Malaysia with him. Only a few years after her departure, she now cannot find her roots in the country that has gone through a wave of political and economical change in the aftermath of May 13. According to Chuah in an interview, the creation of a character like Ai Lian was due to her dissatisfaction over members of Malaysian diaspora who emigrated soon after the riots and who returned only when the economy was doing well. These people continued to be “extremely critical” of the country and voiced their criticisms of the post-1969 policies as evidence of Malay hegemony operating in many sectors. Chuah found them “lack[ing] of commitment” and accused them of being “opportunistic and cynical” (Sim and Chuah 51).

In order to deal with such a character, Chuah sets up a murder mystery plot that traps Ai Lian and forces her to pursue the “truth”. Eventually, she marries Jonathan Templeton, Michael’s father, whilst carrying Michael’s child, and finds out that it was Puteh, the house servant of Templeton estate, who was responsible for two murders that took place in respectively the 40s and the 70s. More extraordinary is the fact that Puteh is in fact Michael’s biological mother,

and Ai Lian's long-lost aunt. Jonathan leaves behind a large plantation estate in Ulu Banir, making Ai Lian the sole beneficiary of the asset. During his lifetime, he had sold the land in bits and pieces to Puteh's husband Yusuf. Chuah cleverly portrays this bequest as a symbol of residual colonialism, which I will explain later, with Ai Lian and the family of Yusuf being made the postcolonial inheritors of the native land. In the end, Ai Lian hands over Jock's Hill, where the Templeton Bungalow stands, to Hafiz, who is Puteh's son. Hafiz plans to build a science college on the hill, in accordance with his father Yusuf's wishes.

The reason why Ai Lian does not wish to make use of the land or have any property in the country is due to her sense of not belonging. She becomes wealthy from dealings in the financial market, but not through investments in property, manufacturing or industrial sectors. In this case, Hafiz still thinks she is being "opportunistic and uncommitted" (285). Sim Wai Chew has noted that Ai Lian's handing over of the plantation mansion to Hafiz is a telling climax, for only then does she alter her stance and start to establish a connection to local culture by supporting Hafiz's community development project (Sim "Beyond" 668). Though Hafiz's project is hindered by other reasons, as we would find out in *Days*, the gesture is an important symbol pointing to the need to infuse local knowledge with ex-colonial land. Moreover, the transfer of land to local Malays can be seen as an affirmative reference to the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Unlike the prevalent opposition to, and sardonic attitude towards the NEP adopted by many non-Malay writers and scholars, Chuah seems to support

the social protection agenda that underwrites it. Also noted by Sim, Chuah's narrative conjoins the prevailingly dichotomous aspects of redistribution *and* recognition in postcolonial studies, and it also seeks to redress uneven development in the country (Sim "Beyond" 667). Chuah's concerns about redistribution are further developed in *Days*, as I will show later, for she intertwines the question of social redistribution with Malay *adat* and modernity. Thus, in this manner, we can conclude that Chuah overturns the dominant post-1969 literary narrative pattern, inclusive of those that I explored in Chapter 2, because she stresses the importance of redistributive considerations. For her, post-1969 policies such as the NEP, the National Language Policy (NLC) and the National Culture Policy (NCP) are tools to promote social justice and national identity. In another interview, she declared herself a "confirmed socialist" and a "student of history" who also benefitted from the NEP, and thus she cannot disagree with the principles of the NEP as they are aimed at redressing economic mal-distribution (Quayum and Chuah 145). In this case, some might accuse Chuah of supporting state-led policies that target a homogenous, "surface-level" national integration. In the following paragraphs, however, I will show that Chuah actually rejects state-led identity construction and emphasizes a "grassroots" formation of individuals. Her stance can be seen in the opinions that she expresses about the future of Malaysian literary productions.

Chuah constantly expresses her dissatisfactions with the overemphasis on the post-1969 categorization of "sectional literature" or "national literature" in

Malaysian literary criticism. For her, “all writings are sectional” and claiming recognition as “national literature” is the last label that she wants for her fiction, for the term evokes thoughts of “Stalin’s Russia”, “Hitler’s Germany” or “Maoist China” (Sim and Chuah, 58; Quayum and Chuah 146). In this regard, it is interesting to juxtapose this proclamation of Chuah with the subtitles of her two novels. What did she imply by identifying her own work as being “Malaysian” novels, and yet rejecting them being labelled as “national”? In my opinion, Chuah adopts a nation-state-based understanding of challenges and issues in Malaysia, and this is done from a bottom-up perspective in her writing instead of pursuing the handed-down agenda advanced by authorities. At the same time, she rejects the demands of non-Malay-language writers who want their works to be recognized as “national literature” because, in doing so, they assume the power that lies in the hands of state authority. Instead, her idea of “nation”—her homeland Malaysia—is seen through the eyes of individuals from all communities. And it is this nation that she wants to become a part of, and that is why she is supportive of the principles of the NEP and other affirmative actions which promote social integration and redistributive justice at the state level.

Certainly, Chuah is not unaware of the abuse of power in the process of implementing these policies. For instance, the protagonist in *Days*, Hafiz, is shamefully astonished by the poverty he witnesses at Kampung Basoh, the traditional Malay village in which he wakes up after his fall into a ravine. He cannot describe the level of poverty in the village, which “was supposed to have

been eliminated by the NEP" (99). What Chuah wants to emphasize here is that while the operational objective of the NEP was to reduce economic gaps among the ethnic communities, its implementation in recent times has largely neglected the rural masses. According to political economists Just Faaland et al, the objectives of the NEP had gradually shifted towards the prioritization of "growth", and only after that came "poverty and restructuring" (Faaland et al, 87). Chuah's concern with the economic growth discourse and the leaving behind of rural masses is showcased in her second novel *Days*, which I will discuss in the next section. Nevertheless, at this stage, we may note that her notion of creating a "Malaysian" literature but not a "national" one is telling. Chuah is stressing the importance of recognizing post-1969 issues structurally and historically, not merely focusing critique on the prevalent Malay-centric ideology. In doing the latter, one arguably takes a similar stance and logic with the state-led racially-essentialist narrative. In other words, both racialised and "deracialised" accounts are problematic because they do not foster full recognition of multilingual and multicultural realities in Malaysia.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Chuah would suggest that the first thing we have to do in terms of improving the circumstances of literature in Malaysia would be to

stop all this squabbling over languages and whether a literature is "national" or "sectional", and start translating all the literature

available in Malaysia into all the languages spoken, written and read in Malaysia. (150)

Similarly, my objective in putting Sinophone and Anglophone literature together in this dissertation works in tandem with Chuah's stance. It strives to fill the gap of comparative literature and translated literature in Malaysia, and hopes to map out the dynamic of multilingual and multicultural constellation of literature. Furthermore, this intention can never succeed if we do not put the literatures on a *nation-state*-based level of understanding, or if we merely call for a "transnational turn" or a "postnational" flexibility in literary studies, as some postcolonial scholars like to do. The ideas of nationhood and national identity are reflected upon constantly in the works of Chuah Guat Eng, and they also serve as important point of reference in Au Sow-yee's films which I will discuss in the second part of this chapter. In what follows, I examine the crime plot of *Echoes* which is critical of the Cold War agenda in Malay(si)a, one that appropriates the nation-building campaign in the (post)colonial society.

Cold War Justice and Moral Discourse

The most salient and prominent feature in *Echoes*, other than the above-mentioned motifs, is its crime fiction genre. Chuah incorporates detective elements into the novel, yet the work does not resemble the popular, western crime fiction. Firstly, there is no intelligent detective or inspector who pursues the truth relentlessly. Secondly, blameworthiness is not the main concern of the

novel. Instead, the novel puts the narrator Ai Lian into a difficult position for she, as an outsider, is disturbed by the indifferent attitudes of Inspector Tajuddin and Jonathan Templeton towards solving the murder mystery. Ai Lian thinks that both the characters should have been more eager to find out the truth, for Inspector Tajuddin is the prosecutor of justice, and Jonathan is the direct victim of two cases of murders—his wife Esther was killed in 1949 and his fiancée-to-be Cynthia in 1974. However, both of them use their position to close the cases hastily, claiming that Esther was killed by the communists and Cynthia by robbers. As we find out in the end, it is Puteh who carries out the two murders, and it seems that the indifferent attitudes of Tajuddin and Jonathan are caused by their emotional attachment to the prime murder suspect. Furthermore, the novel shows that Puteh, after her confession, is not remorseful in the least. And she is not brought to punishment, despite the fact that the truth is later disclosed and despite the fact that her own son Hafiz was once in the police force and is now a lawyer.

In an essay that examines three crime fictions written by Malaysian women writers, Chuah comments that *Echoes* is about “silences, misinformation and disinformation about past acts of violence and violations of justice, which reverberate in the lives of present-day Malaysians” (Chuah “When Abused Women” 147). In other words, the novel questions the legislative system in Malaysia that disregards justice and law, and further criticizes the muzzling acts of covering up information to prevent truth from being told and the past from

being revealed. In my opinion, Chuah's tactic of incorporating detective elements into her fiction sheds lights on the demands made by the younger generation for history and truth to be told. It is a way to challenge the state-led narrative, especially in the Cold War aftermath. That is to say, Chuah's tactic calls into question at least two national events in Malaysia which is shrouded by the Cold War—the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and the May 13 riots (1969).

For one thing, the case of Esther's murder is concluded by Inspector Tajuddin as a communist revenge on Jonathan—who can be seen as a symbol of British colonization. For another thing, Cynthia's death in the 1970s is concluded as robbery, which can also be taken as a dramatisation of post-1969 imputation generated by the government. The politics of "blaming", in these cases, showcases the collapse of the state's legislative system in the Cold War shadow, which is akin to what Agamben calls the "state of exception". Again, as shown in my previous chapters, communists were accused of being conspirators responsible for the state of Emergency declared during the two mentioned periods. The historical truth of the two "national" events was in no way accessible and discussable, because of "the blanket of silence cast over the nation" after they occurred (*Echoes* 56). However, an outsider like Ai Lian is inevitably involved in the incidents, and she feels the urge to uncover the truth and seek justice. The fact that she refuses to marry Michael even though she carries her child can be read as her dissatisfaction over his hiding of truth from her. However, when she finally discovers the truth that Puteh, her long-lost aunt

and also a victim of rape, is the culprit, she resorts to reasserting the importance of family ties by “reuniting” with her instead of casting blame. This, on the other hand, generates the debates of morality and justice.

In this regard, Chuah’s explanation is telling as she points out that the main focus of this novel “is not the morality of the wrongdoers, but the moral confusion of innocent bystanders” (Chuah “When Abused Women” 149). Ai Lian experiences moral confusion when she discovers her own emotional attachment to the prime murder suspect. After the truth is revealed, she cannot but find solace in reuniting with Puteh: “My daughter’s grandmother. My aunt. My sister in womanhood. My guru” (*Echoes* 331). Kinship and gender solidarity override Ai Lian’s sense of displacement in the country; however, they do not straighten out her moral confusion even in the ending of the novel. In the last scene, she feels “out of tune” and is bewildered by the “too[-]much” world, and can only ask Anna to take over the wheel (337).

This anomic feeling that she suffers from in the last scene, I argue, exposes Ai Lian’s alienation despite of or because of her material success in the currency market. After knowing that Puteh killed Esther and Cynthia, Ai Lian becomes even more anomic or socially disoriented because of her love for Michael and Hafiz. She suddenly remembers her miscarriage of Jonathan’s child, something that she had never told anyone. Thinking about it now, she imagines it might be another chance for her to “learn to love”, but during that time she “had been too busy with [her] buying and selling...[her] currency exchange...[her] *quid pro quo*”

(336). Seeing Puteh's bravery, as a mother who would kill to secure her loved ones' property, she sees herself as, in contrast, a displaced woman who committed to nothing but "buying and selling", "getting and spending" (336-7). With this in mind, we may be able to conclude that Ai Lian's moral confusion is not only in relation to the issue of social justice, but also to the economic boom in the post-1969 Malaysia, which I will examine in a later section. This last scene also foreshadows the critical issues that Chuah will examine in depth in the sequel *Days*, namely, the conditions for familial and social commonalities to arise in the country's modernity project. In the following section, I will look at how these features are showcased in *Days*, a novel that is set against the backdrop of 1997 Asian financial crisis.

The Bumigeois Dilemma: Adat and Modernity

One important aspect of the configuration of Chuah's second novel, *Days of Change*, is her choice to tell the story in the first person, through the eyes of Hafiz, an upper-middle class Malay man. The burgeoning class in the post-1969 era was referred to as "bumigeois", a neologism combined "bumiputra" and "bourgeois" by the poet Salleh Ben Joned, which points towards the new, urbanized Malay middle class. The story continues Hafiz's story from *Echoes*, which we follow in diary entries that are posthumously published by Anna Templeton, his niece. Chuah, in another essay, argues that one common feature the post-1969 non-Malay writers share is the near-absence of significant Malay

characters in their novels, especially in the works of “younger and/or diasporic non-Malay writers who first started publishing in the 1990s” (Chuah “Strangers” 23). However, for her, some older-generation, home-based writers, herself included, have been working consistently to challenge this post-1969 phenomenon by their “insiderist” portrayals of the Malay world. Their efforts are aimed at providing “alternative concepts of social integration” in contrast to those who portray Malays as “inaccessible others” (30).

Chuah’s stance is clear. On the one hand, she eschews the prevalent post-1969 writings that centre on communal issues and are implicitly complicit with the state-sanctioned agenda. On the other hand, she strives to emphasize the commonalities in multicultural Malaysia, seeking a healthy process where parties can negotiate concepts of social integration and commensurability in literature. She labels the Anglophone writers such as Lloyd Fernando, Lee Kok Liang and herself “Leftist Intellectuals” who address social integration to:

reduce the psychic distance between the readers and the Malay world, enabling the novelists to reveal the heterogeneous, multi-voiced, and conflict-ridden reality of Malay society, dismantle essentialist and absolutist ideologies, and expose the corruption and hypocrisy of those who use such ideologies to wield oppressive power (Chuah “Strangers” 28).

In other words, Chuah rejects the dominant discourse of a communal paradigm in the state narrative, as well as in Malaysian literature. In order to do so, she

adopts inter-ethnic features in her fiction as contents to envision an imagined community that embraces understanding and integration. Eliciting Hafiz's thoughts in a stream of consciousness, she exerts herself to penetrate the mindset of a Malay Muslim upper-middle class man.

In *Days*, Hafiz suffers from amnesia after his falling into a ravine. He finds himself waking up in a traditional Malay village called Kampung Basoh, as two reticent traditional healers, Mak Soh, and her husband, Pak Endot, have saved him from his injuries. Despite their ethnic commonalities, Hafiz soon discovers he is "out of tune" with this rural village. His English mumblings during his coma, his Western suit and his non-local Malay accent betray him as a privileged Malay counterpart. Witnessing the poverty in the secluded village, he reflects morally on his own position in the "tradition-modernity continuum" (171). If we can still recall, Hafiz took over Jock's Hill as a gift from Ai Lian and planned to build the Al-'Alim College of Science on it in accordance with his father Yusuf's wish. However, the plan was put off for various reasons, and during that period Hafiz ran a development corporation and a law firm, and also drove a Jaguar to "match" his social status. This takes place in the post-NEP period, the time when the National Development Policy (NDP) replaced NEP in 1990, and the economic boom in Malaysia invigorated investments in many sectors like a miracle. In the wake of the NDP, the then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad spoke of Vision 2020—an optimistic blueprint for turning Malaysia into a developed nation by 2020. Hafiz, perhaps similar to other *bumigeois*, enjoys this state-led

developmentalism. But it is not until this modernisation project finally invades his hometown, Ulu Banir, that he starts to rethink the legitimacy of developmentalism; it is his days in Kampung Basoh that pushes him to reconsider moral issues raised by development, and the value of *adat* and modernity.

In the novel, Hafiz finds out that a politically connected developer Hartindah is seeking opportunities to flood Ulu Banir for a Disneyland-type theme park, and it is then that he takes a step to protect his family, his land and the ecology of Ulu Banir. Waking up in Kampung Basoh after his fall, Hafiz is cared for by the two mentioned healers, who live with their only grandchild whose parents had died from an undiagnosed disease. The backwardness of Kampung Basoh urges him to think of transforming his father's science college project into a "college of traditional science", in which both the traditional Malay healing cures and the jungle ecology will be sustained (167). In his imagination, Kampung Basoh can be developed into a traditional health village, and the local people will be employed in this "health-and eco-tourist industry from the ground up" (168). He believes this will certainly work, unlike Hartindah's vulgar theme-park, which also claimed that it is carrying out a "proper" development project. In other words, his project would adhere to the principle that his father Yusuf held on to—doing business with "social conscience" (150).

In this regard, Hafiz undertakes what Giddens calls a "reflexive modernity" examination. Although questioning the "western definition" of

modernization and its Enlightenment ideals of rationalism and progressivism, he does not romanticize his experience in Kampung Basoh, so as not to “talk glibly about the romantic simplicity of rural life” as an oppositional alternative to modernization (158; 99). Writers or artists who embrace the latter discourse often depict and portray an almost identical Malay imaginary that sees rural life as authentic and pure, in contrast with urban life. Joel Kahn, in his study on prestigious Malay writer Shannon Ahmad’s work, reveals such a literary tendency of nostalgic longing in many urban Malay writers (Kahn 36). As a matter of fact, such discourse seems to be no different from the state-led propaganda about Malay kampung life seen in tourist brochures. For Hafiz, the level of poverty and hardships in rural village can never be disguised by such neo-traditional romanticisation. Therefore, his idea of setting up a traditional science college is the result of modernity’s reflexivity, which not only addressed redistributive concerns in post-NEP Malaysia, but also deliberated upon the dialectic of the Malay *adat* and modernization.

Clifford Sather has defined *adat* as “the customary norms, rules, interdictions, and injunctions that guide an individual’s conduct as a member of the community...[and which] embraces more general values, moral ideas, and standards” (Sather 124). Hafiz, the *bumigeois*, re-encounters the value system of *adat* in Kampung Basoh after his father’s death; he accepts the traditional herbal cures used on his body by the healers and is drawn to the couple’s religious piety in everyday life. In a rather sublime scene of Hafiz’s last night in Kampung

Basoh, he feels a mysterious kind of “tranquility”, which makes him aware that his connection to the social activity around him is “the acting out of a tradition” — a tradition that he found beauty in (110-1). Chuah’s adaptation of a Zen-based understanding of Hafiz’s mind showcases the moral and religious dilemma that Hafiz found in the developments of Malaysia and in his own bumigeois position.

In the state-led NEP, and later NDP, agenda, the philosophy upheld by the then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad had been influential. Mahathir asserts that the urbanization of Malays is essential to the economic and political growth of Malaysia. On several occasions, he criticized the Malay *adat* as conservative and a hindrance to modernization, stating that “[b]y and large, the Malay value system and code of ethics are impediments to their progress” (Mahathir 218). It was this prevalent notion of *adat* as traditional and conservative that defined the “Malay dilemma” reflected in the Mahathirist policies during his reign (1981-2003). The Mahathirist modernity project was constructed as a way to achieve nationalist ambitions, and the period of economic success from 1987 to 1996 was in fact fostered by Mahathirist authoritarian governance, which discouraged trade union activism and individual freedom⁵⁷ (Khoo G.C., 11-12; Khoo K.J., 61). Chuah’s method of setting the novel against the chaos of the Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998 is telling, as

⁵⁷ In the 1987 *Operasi Lalang* (Weeding Operation), Mahathir cracked down over hundred social activists, opposition politicians, Chinese educationists, artists, students and others, banning three newspapers with his draconian measures.

it was the prime time of the falling apart of Malaysian economic and political system that had once provided growth and prosperity. The sacking of the then Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim aroused political turmoil and underscored the rise of civil disobedience under Mahathir dictatorship. In the novel, many Malay middle class joined in as demonstrators on the street shouting “Reformasi!”, demanding change but being “water-cannoned, tear-gassed, truncheoned, kicked, punched, arrested, and put away in detention” (152;159). By staging such political upheavals alongside Hafiz’s dilemma as he confronts *adat* and modernity, Chuah arguably highlights the difficult construction of a Malay cultural, political identity and subjectivity in the post-NEP era. In doing so, she does not promote a binary reading of *adat* and modernity, as well as of urban and rural Malays. Instead, she unpacks the intersections between the components integral to the Malay identity, namely *adat*, tradition, Islam and modernity, aiming to achieve “the mid-point where all the polarities would be held in *balance*” (160; my emphasis).

For Hafiz, the stress of identity formation and radical questioning is dealt with through his writings. The diary entries published by his niece Anna Templeton reveal Hafiz’s endeavours to recall past memories using the hexagrams of *I Ching*, and also show how he wrestles with the problem of false-memory which in turn raises the psychological concerns of remembering and forgetting. As a matter of cruel fact, Hafiz’s vivid memory of Kampung Basoh is a false memory. In actuality, he was rescued after his fall into the mentioned

ravine, and stayed in coma in hospital for six months. As Inspector Tajuddin told him twice, firmly, "There is no Kampung Basoh".

False Memory Recollections

The difference between false memories and true ones is the same as for jewels: it is always the false ones that look the most real, the most brilliant.
-Salvador Dali

The revelation gives Hafiz a terrible blow. The fact that he created an entire memory episode for an event that never happened causes him to doubt his sanity. In cognitive psychology, researchers call such experiences "rich false memories"—the subjective feeling of experiencing a "genuine recollection, replete with sensory details, and even expressed with confidence and emotion" yet the event in fact never happened (Loftus and Bernstein 101). Sigmund Freud might be the pioneer in recognizing the fragmentary nature of memories, and, interestingly, his psychoanalytic approach relates distorted memories to childhood experiences. In an essay "Screen Memories" published in 1899, he claims that memories are composite formations of childhood experience represented in distortions. They are to be examined in "problems concerning the operation of memory and its distortions, the importance and *raison d'être* of phantasies, the amnesia covering our early years, and, behind all this, infantile sexuality" (Freud "Screen Memories" 301).

At this point, I think a psychological approach to the issue at hand is helpful. If we relate the false memories to Hafiz's unconscious, they stand up clearly as results of childhood trauma. In this regard, Hafiz's distorted memories, I contend, can be analysed from at least two different perspectives: first, they are delayed consequences of the repressed and traumatic past that push Hafiz to invent a self that manifests a "Malay" identity; second, they are Chuah's effort to capture and underscore a special memory-dependent culture, namely the one that fosters traditional healing, and, to some extent, the divination of *I Ching*, to which the "dominant protocols of knowledge and reasoning have no access" (Nandy "Memory work" 4). In the first formulation, the Templeton family, particularly Hafiz's half-brother Mike, represents the residual, colonial emotion that forces Hafiz to reflect on his postcolonial identity through the use of "false memory". In the second formulation, Hafiz's false memory of the traditional Malay rural village alludes to the reclaiming of cultural heritage, such as *adat* and folk memory, in contemporary times. These are heritage whose memory-dependent features have become inaccessible in modern forms, in written history, state-sanctioned discourse, and so on.

Hafiz's traumatic past is formed with his memories towards his half-brother Mike, or Malik, who symbolizes the colonial legacy. In the prequel, we learn that Hafiz and Malik grew up together as Yusuf and Puteh's children, until one day after the war, when Malik was four and Hafiz two years younger, when Jonathan came back to Ulu Banir. Knowing that Puteh would not marry him,

Jonathan brings back Esther, an American woman he met in Singapore, to become the “mother” of Mike. From that point on, Malik stays in the Templeton estate with his family, and “becomes” Michael Templeton. He continues to address Yusuf and Puteh as father and mother until he “[grows] older and more British”, when he finds no word in any language to show their relationship—“once parents, now servants” (197).

Hafiz’s relationship with his British brother remains positive, even though during his younger years Hafiz often compares the two of them. He even imagines that it was he who became a Templeton, a “European, fair-skinned, grey-eyed, brown-haired, wealthy, going to school in England, treated with deference [everywhere]” without a single trace of “native timidity” (26). These imaginings reveal Hafiz’s envy of the superiority that Mike possesses, from a literally overnight event when he became a “Templeton”, and he can still recall witnessing Mike’s act of “self-empowerment” achieved simply by “invoking the Templeton name” (26). More crucially, he also more or less learns during his childhood that Mike is Jonathan’s and his mother’s son. These facts become psychological pressure points that push him to radically question and ascertain his own identity as a Malay Muslim man in Malaysia.

In a similar vein, Hafiz’s sense of exclusion is also stirred up by his childless marriage. Seeing his reticent mother Puteh grow happy in the company of Ai Lian and Anna, Hafiz feels “regret” that it was not his wife and daughter making her happy, but instead the Templeton offsprings (256). At this moment,

he suddenly understands how his father Yusuf “must have felt all those years ago” seeing Puteh and Mike “huddled together” as if “no one else could enter” their circle (256). Moreover, after Mike’s death, Ai Lian is put in sole charge of his possession, including Jock’s Hill, although Mike had previously stated to Hafiz that he intended to endow the bungalow for his science college project. However, Mike does not mention the endowment in his will, and leaves everything to Ai Lian. In his diary entries, Hafiz hints at his dissatisfaction on this matter as he thinks it would have been “logical” for Mike to make him an executor since he was a lawyer (27). In this regard, Ai Lian, a Templeton by marriage, inherits Jock’s Hill and is the one Hafiz has to ask permission for the mentioned endowment. This was possibly why Hafiz makes no progress on the science college project for years, until he comes up with the idea of building a traditional health village. This sense of exclusion in both his native land and his family, I argue, causes Hafiz to doubt his own identity and subjectivity, and he could only resort to creating a false memory of the traditional Malay value system to validate his own identity.

These incidents, taken into account, show how Chuah continually uses the symbol of land inheritance and collective memories to highlight the legacy of British colonialism. And eventually it is this land of Ulu Banir that makes Hafiz fight so hard with his own psycho-physiological body to prevent improper “development” on it. Hafiz’s false memory of Kampung Basoh is the novel’s way of juxtaposing Hafiz’s difficult construction of his Malay identity with the

collective trauma that is passed down to individuals in this land-country created by colonialism. To put it in another way, the repressed memory of Hafiz's childhood is shown in tandem with the fate of post-independent Malaya, and both of them are tainted or overshadowed by residual colonialism. The false memory of Kampung Basoh, in this regard, serves as a criticism targeting Malay elites who inherited the colonial legacy in their national imagination and performed what Nandy calls a "second form of colonization" (Nandy *Intimate Enemy* xi). Although Hafiz reflexively dealt with this modernity project, he is somehow walking on the thin line between colonization and modernization. In the following excerpts, we can see how he was besieged by globalized, capitalist ideals of developments:

"I told myself, that was what development was for. To make everyone rich enough to move easily and seamlessly among all possible worlds and feel at home in all of them" (172).

At the same time, he is aware of the "falseness" of his nostalgic longing for the rural life, and so he "worried and fretted" (172-3). Thinking of his brother Mike, who did not want to return to Malaysia, Hafiz says "it isn't just the white man who can't return...[t]he westernized native can't return either" (172). His dilemma of being a *bumigeois* formulates his recollections of false memory in Kampung Basoh. In other words, the authentic, native Malay village becomes the "bumigeois' burden", which some Mahathirists see as necessary for further

developments and civilization. Hafiz uses false memory as a redemptive device for him to legitimize his development projects in Kampung Basoh. This device allows him to invent a new self who performs duties and responsibilities for an imagined community. Simultaneously, Hafiz sees this as a way to revalue and preserve Malay *adat*, which makes up a key part of his identity as a modern Malay Muslim man.

Taken from a different direction, we can also examine the false memory plot from the perspective of memory-dependent knowledge systems. One such system, Malay traditional healing, cannot be preserved and recognized by dominant protocols of cultural history, such as in written history texts or in state-sanctioned discourse. In a recent essay, Ashis Nandy points out the importance of preserving and revaluing such “living memory banks”:

[O]ne must at least be bold enough to affirm that some skills and some vocations are more heavily memory-dependent and require long, face-to-face, intense interactions between the recognized carries of knowledge and their chosen apprentices or students. Written texts, scores, or digitalized records do not do full justice to them and, to appreciate their hidden grandeur, one must look at them in their own terms (Nandy “Memory work” 11).

In other words, Hafiz’s memory recollection through his diary entries fails to capture the living memory in Kampung Basoh, as well as *adat* and the heritage of the traditional Malay healing. There are no available protocols to value and preserve such memory-dependent cultural heritage. Hafiz, while in the village,

asks Mak Soh about how she acquired healing knowledge and skills, and he even suggests that she “write[s] down” her methods of healing (165). Nonetheless, written texts do not preserve or sustain the knowledge itself; they can only “record” it. The false memory of Kampung Basoh indicates the limitation that modern forms face in their attempts to access such knowledge, and the latter thus stands out as a symbol of resistance to the dominant politics of knowledge. Furthermore, the formation of such living memory and history is constructed as handed-down knowledge within a grassroots community, not in state-sanctioned formulas or as part of the national imaginary. More often than not, such cultural heritage is seen as opposing or hindering the path of nation-building, if we still recall Mahathir’s Vision 2020 goals. Such indigenous knowledge is likely to be challenged by the state, which in fact exposes the contradictions of the state-sanctioned bumiputra policies which supposedly stands up for and protects “indigenous” national identity.

To sum up, Chuah’s portrayal of Hafiz’s false memory experiences is arguably a deliberate plan to problematize the two-pronged dilemma that Hafiz confronts—the quasi-colonial attempt at modernizing village natives, and the inability to preserve and value the memory-dependent heritage in an appropriate form. At the same time, these two aspects are arguably Hafiz’s own responses to his repressed childhood memories, since he tries to affirm a Malay Muslim identity in the face of colonialism/neo-colonialism and the desire for modernity. In this situation, he has to break the mould of conventional

“development” in ways that discover and justify shared norms of *adat*, tradition, modernity, nation, and developments. More crucially, as we can see in the movement from *Echoes* to *Days*, Chuah’s not only seeks to transform the post-1969 ethnic paradigm to emphasise inter-ethnic commonalities and redistributive considerations, she also endeavours to capture the dilemmas of the *bumigeois*, dilemmas that many non-Malay writers do not deal with in their works.

The ideas that Chuah explicitly tackles in her works, such as the complex identification of *adat*, modernity, redistribution, nation and memory, are also significant motifs in the works of the young Malaysian filmmaker Au Sow-Yee. In the second part of this chapter, I will look at how Au commits to incorporating the above said norms in her experimental films. I argue that Chuah’s literary forms and Au’s cinematic representations of culture can be viewed as “memory texts” that invites readers to examine and deconstruct the mnemonic codes that are constantly shaping our imaginings of nation.

The Mengkerang Project: Re-presenting Representations

Born and raised in Malaysia, Au Sow-Yee graduated from Chinese Culture University (Taiwan), majored in theatre arts and received her Master of Fine Arts degree from San Francisco Art Institute. An experimental and reflexive filmmaker, she is currently a graduate student of new media arts at the Taipei National University of Arts. She has developed two artistic paths in her career,

one in image-making mechanism, in which she creates live cinema performance, the other in experimental moving images (videos), which she adopts to explore the politics of images, history and geography. Au's latest work, the "Mengkerang project", was exhibited in Taipei in April 2015 and Kuala Lumpur in August in the same year; the project comprises three films: *A Day Without Sun in Mengkerang (Chapter One)*, *Sang Kancil, Hang Tuah, Raja Bersiong, Bomoh, the Missing Jet and Others*, and *Pak Tai Foto*.

This project is a composition showing her ongoing inquiries into the paradoxical representation of nation and globalization in dominant discourse, in which she questions the politics of "representation", which is "illusory and vague" (Au "Reconstructing" 26). In the following section, I take her cinematic production as texts, examining the narrative that is constructed in a "*gotong-royong*" mode—literally "mutual assistance", which itself forms a key part of what is considered "communal spirit" in Indonesian and Malaysian philosophy. In particular, I examine her attempt to fabricate a community-utopia named "Mengkerang". I argue that her works seek to show the limitation of historical representation in dominant discourse, and in doing so she endeavours to reflect on the convergence of *adat* and modernity by highlighting memories of the invisible voices, of various social "bits and pieces" that have been scattered in the process of historicisation.

A Day without Sun in Mengkerang (Chapter One) invites three main narrators (a Malay man, an English-speaking Sri Lankan woman and a Hokkien-

speaking Chinese man), who represent the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia, to narrate their own imagined stories of Mengkerang in a relayed manner. The storyline in the pseudo-documentary is completely reliant on the narratives of the three storytellers, which is out of the control of the filmmaker Au Sow-ye. In this fashion, they imagine Mengkerang as a mysterious, paradoxical, sunny place run by a commune system, in which people from different cultural backgrounds live together peacefully. The story of this imaginary “place” starts with three local characters Raju, Harith and Susan, and they are joined by Jonathan who is tracing his grandfather’s history in Mengkerang. Everyone in Mengkerang knows Jonathan’s grandfather—he has turned into a stone that guards the shore and island—but no one will tell Jonathan the truth. Symbolically, Jonathan’s grandfather resembles colonial ancestors who had been glorified in statue form overlooking the local island. The statue arguably recalls that of British colonial official, Stamford Raffles, which stands beside the Singapore River where he first landed. This historical myth of Jonathan’s grandfather seems to symbolize the colonial past that had been partly concealed by the older generation. Au, in response to repressed history, dismantles the usual authoritative voices in national history by telling the Mengkerang history through a cooperative story-telling chain. By adopting this apparatus, she entrusts speaking power to the three narrators instead of narrating the story in a monolingual way.

Nevertheless, it is paradoxical that the imagined Mengkerang stories told by the three narrators are constructed in tandem with the logic of the state apparatus. The images of this ideal place established by them are similar to what the Malaysian national education system and tourist propaganda had implanted on its receivers (Au "Reconstructing" 27). In other words, I contend, their representation of the "realities" of harmonious interethnic relationship or peaceful rural life in Mengkerang gives an oversimplified interpretation of the politics of culture, which has been shaped by the state apparatus. Au probes into the problematic formation of the imagined community, which is not only defined by the national regime, but also by the populace. She calls into question such "representation" of realities that neglect the "sense of helplessness in real life" felt by many individuals (27). To put it in another way, the psychological constructions of these imaginings unconsciously connect themselves to the national ideology, one that often overlooks minority voices. Bearing this in mind, Au's third film in the Mengkerang project *Pak Tai Foto* fills the gap by capturing absent voices in the city, namely lower class immigrants who have no part in the narratives of imagined community. Before examining *Pak Tai Foto*, I will first turn to the second film *Sang Kancil, Hang Tuah, Raja Bersiong, Bomoh, the Missing Jet and Others* to explore how Au rejuvenates the living memories of folklores and tales, and how she juxtaposes the heroic and the gothic through the use of

moving images⁵⁸. In doing so, I argue that she conveys resistance against the top-down national ideology and offers an alternative representation pursuing the dialectics of *adat* and modernity, and using a *gotong-royong* mechanism. In addition to that, she problematizes the politics shaping “national” heroes and phantoms by revisiting mnemonic folklores and myths and presenting them in a way resistant to state ideology.

Gotong-royong spirit in the Cold War nation-building

Similar to *A Day without Sun in Mengkerang* (Chapter One), Aw’s second film weaves together myths and history, and the stories are told in a *gotong-royong* style, which signifies an important philosophy of the Malay *adat*—communal work⁵⁹. Although the stories here are not narrated in a relayed storytelling chain, they are constructed by montage, by juxtaposing various images taken from the collective memory and recollections of Malaysian folklores and history. The film links images of daily lives with sequences taken from older Malay films and archival footages, enabling dialogue between contemporary “real” lives, fictional “heroic” films and historical documentary. The quasi-folklore of Mengkerang in this film is narrated by an authoritative voice that

⁵⁸ For more detailed explanations of the “Gothic”, please see Chapter 3. In this chapter, I use it to refer the “common fear” that is constructed by state propaganda, namely the communists.

⁵⁹ The term *gotong-royong* is a long-standing Javanese expression which serves to mean “an indigenous cultural tradition ranging over many other domains of social life”, and its signified meaning—mutual and reciprocal assistance—forms as one of the core tenets in Indonesian and Malay philosophy, which emphasizes the collective life (Bowen 545-6).

sounds like the “reliable narrator” commonly used in documentaries, yet is composed by fragments of moving images of the past and present.

If we still recall Chuah Guat Eng’s story, the traditional healers Pak Endot and Mak Soh work as *kampung* (village) doctors, and their contribution to the *kerja kampung* (village chores) reflects the intricate relationships between work, personal relations and moral conception in Malay philosophy. Chuah projects the idea of social interaction through Hafiz’s rejuvenation of the Malay *adat*, which is rooted in the communal “*kampung*” spirit. In contrast, Au Sow-yee’s intervention into the Malay knowledge system is at least twofold: first, she uses the mechanism of incorporating *gotong-royong* into her films to create an imagined community; second, she investigates Malay folklores and myths, using them as mnemonic traditions to challenge the state-commissioned version of these “national” heroes.

As stated by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the inventory of *gotong-royong*, similar to other indefinable value-idea-images like *rukun* (mutual adjustment) or *tolong-menolong* (reciprocal assistance), governs social interaction in the Malay and Indonesian worlds with “a force as sovereign as it is subdued” (Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 211). These behavioural expressions signify the “noiseless perfection of communal accord” rather than the absolute command or “punctilious performance” (211). In other words, the *gotong-royong* spirit functions as propriety and consensus, which underpins the Malay *adat* as judgment and value. Au deciphers the Malay knowledge system and, in a

fashion similar to Chuah, probes into the Malay psyche to dismantle the hegemony of Malay cultural essentialism built up during the post-1969 ethnic paradigm period. As ethnic Chinese Malaysians, their methods of exploring the Malay knowledge system and the “Malay dilemma” arguably break through the post-1969 racialized *or* deracialized protocols and thus form new “structures of feeling” (Raymond Williams’ term) in the social present.

While Chuah highlights the *bumigeois* dilemma in terms of spiritual hollowness and materialist aspiration operating in concert with national modernization goals, Au, from another perspective, overturns the modular form of western nationalism discussed by many postcolonial scholars and seeks to construct an alternative nation through the indigenous knowledge system. This nation, which she names Mengkerang, is constructed by its populace in a *gotong-royong* fashion using various local myths. The moving images and narratives in Au’s cinematic texts serve as sites of contestation between manifold power “sites” and brokers including colonial dominion, state authority, the leftist camp, and ordinary citizens. What is meaningful in Au’s cinematic encounter is that she reformulates the historical juncture caused by the effects of the Cold War working through the entire nation-building period. To put it differently, Au clearly distinguishes the Cold War elements in the problematic formations of the nation-state during the state of Emergencies declared in respectively, 1948-1960 and 1969-1971, returning to these historical junctures and retrieving absent voices muzzled by state authority. In doing so, she aims to rejuvenate the

forgotten history contained in people's collective memory, in "leftist" history, in Malay traditional values, in folklores and in myths. Au's method in re-establishing an imagined nation has, I contend, successfully disassembled state ideology and its logic of historical narration, and as such furnishes a new point of departure that respects memory-dependent knowledge such as myths, folklores and alternative history. With this in mind, I argue that Au's cinematic encounter can be viewed as "memory texts" that summon and preserve the collective memories of Malaysians.

The Politics of Revisiting National Heroes and Phantoms

In the film, we see the excerpts from some Malay "heroic" films produced in the 1950s and 1960s that tell stories of legendary figures like Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat, and these in turn resonate with the stories told by Mengkerang narrator about Sang Kancil (the deer), Raja Bersiong (the Fang King), Hang Tuah, Pak Wang and Pontianak (the vampire). In addition, Au also incorporates some archival footage from a British news agency that recorded historical images such as the British armed forces entering the Malayan jungle to eradicate communists, the military training given to Malayan women for self-defense, and the 1956 Baling Talks held between communist party leaders and national representatives⁶⁰. Film critic Sing Song-yong has rightly pointed out that these

⁶⁰ The Baling Talks was held on 28 December 1956, eight months before the proposed Malaya's independence, in an attempt to end the Emergency situation in the new nation. The Alliance

images are used by authorities to create a “national or heroic myth”. Au Sow-ye’s usage of these images arguably highlights “the struggle between the hunter and the prey”, and this also questions the “state of violence in which colonialism and nationalism mutat[e] from myths, replac[ing] historical events” (Sing 14).

In this way, Au revisits the cultural formation of heroic and gothic “national” figures in Malaysian history. The footage of the renowned film *Hang Tuah* (1955) showcases a famous duelling scene between Malacca Sultanate heroes Hang Tuah and his best friend Hang Jebat, in which Tuah dutifully abides by the King’s order to kill Jebat for treason. For a long time, the Tuah-Jebat conflict has been inscribed in the memory of Malaysians, particularly in the Malay community, which captures the tension between loyalty to the state (Tuah) and loyalty to friendship and justice (Jebat). Cultural studies scholar Khoo Gaik Cheng in her important book, *Reclaiming Adat*, has contributed to this issue by examining the links between Malay *adat*, Islam and modernity and by situating the Tuah-Jebat myth at the centre of these overlapping linkages. She lays out the literary representations of the two national heroes, analysing the logic of how a feudal figure like Hang Tuah was configured as a national hero in various historical periods, and how a rebel character like Hang Jebat was received as a modern individualist hero. Both of their receptions epitomize

representatives are Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tan Cheng Lock and David Marshall, while the Communist leaders are Chin Peng, Rashid Maidin and Chen Tien. The talks were unsuccessful as the communists refused the “complete surrender” terms, and soon after the talk, the offer of amnesty was withdrawn and this heightened the conflicts between the two parties.

Malaysians' changing attitudes towards nationalism and modernization. Furthermore, the dichotomy of the rational, loyal Hang Tuah and the emotional, sensual Hang Jebat can be associated with the personalities of political leaders, like Mahathir, who adopted a dictatorial leadership stance, and his opponent, Anwar, who was accused of being a national traitor in late 1998 (24). Khoo also notes that the debates of Tuah-Jebat nationalism rarely appear in the writing of non-Malay Malaysians, who have been marginalized by hegemonic Malay cultural assimilationism (32). In this case, Au, in her cinematic texts, similar to the purpose pursued by Chuah's texts, endeavours to break through the impasse by probing into the Malay psyche to understand and further deconstruct the post-1969 ethnic paradigm.

In addition to (re)fabricating Malay heroic myths, putting them into the Mengkerang tales, Au also problematizes the politics underpinning the shaping of national heroes by incorporating images of British armed forces and the communist party leader Chin Peng into her film. In the name of Cold War, the anti-imperialist struggles of the communists and the leftists have long been eliminated and denied, and they are often portrayed in state ideology as terrorists and traitors. In other words, the successful implantation of anti-communist propaganda has moulded a demonized image of communists and leftists. Yet, in contrast, the efforts of these parties have widely resounded with people at the grassroots level, and the demand for public release of various historical records linked to that period has increased since the signing of the 1989

Peace Treaty. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, independent filmmaker Amir Muhammad made two films about the communists after reading Chin Peng's memoir *My Side of History*, and the result of his efforts was the banning of both films by authorities. Au's revisiting of Cold War history is arguably similar to Amir's, as they both question the claim that communists are terrorists, while refusing to glorify them as "heroes". Both of them engage the politics of memories to render a fragmented and disturbing narrative of history, prompting the audience to adopt their own individual understanding of "myths" and "history" in order to contribute to "national" collective memory. In so doing, filmmaker and audience straddle the border between myths and history, past and present, reality and fiction, heroes and phantoms.

Explaining her project, Au quotes from Ashis Nandy's reference to Shamanism, arguing that a shaman is a "modest symbol of resistance to dominant politics of knowledge" who has "one foot in the familiar, one foot outside; one foot in the present, one in the future" (Au "Reconstructing" 28; Nandy "Shamans" 265). That is to say, the shaman works as a medium who, as Chuah Guat Eng puts it in her novel, stands in "the mid-point where all the polarities would be held in balance" (*Days*, 160). For this reason, Au creates the character of Pak Wang in her film along with other mythical figures. Pak Wang firmly sets one foot on the sandy beach, one foot in the ocean, symbolizing a shamanic intermediary who resists the dominant politics of knowledge. In the end, Pak Wang is killed by the fangs of Raja Bersiong, and before his last drop of

blood is sucked out he casts a curse on Mengkerang and its people—transforming his body into flames to burn down the forest, thus making Mengkerang a time-warped place of eternal sunlight. Significantly, when the narrator narrates Pak Wang's story, the image on screen is a recording of Chin Peng participating in the Baling Talks in 1956. This coexistence of image and sound arguably urges the audience to see the talks as a crucial event that will change the fate of the nation forever, just as Pak Wang's curse impacts forever the future of Mengkerang. Bearing in mind that the unsuccessful Baling Talks heightened the conflicts between the communists and the authorities (British colonizers and the Alliance members) and the latter then unilaterally declared the independence of Malaya in 1957 during the state of Emergency, Au arguably challenges state propaganda, urging us to return to a crucial period during the Cold War to get a clearer picture of the nation-building project.

Interestingly, after Pak Wang's death, people in Mengkerang often hear him singing the Malay folksong "Chan Mali Chan"—whose tune was used by the Singapore government in the 1960s to promote merger with Malaysia as the campaign song titled "Happy and Free"⁶¹. In hindsight, we know that the merger project, like the Baling talks, was a failure. Yet the campaign song has been

⁶¹ Singapore filmmaker Boo Junfeng used the campaign song in a music video *Happy and Free*, which was shown in the 2013 Singapore Biennale titled "If the World Changed", in an attempt to articulate the speculative possibility of Singapore still being part of Malaysia in year 2013. This revisiting project shows that younger generation like Boo, Au and Amir are unsatisfied with the state-commissioned version of national history, and are seeking to rejuvenate an alternative history through artistic interventions.

embedded in people's collective memory as officially-sponsored and subsidized "truth". Au's endeavour to retrieve historical consciousness through recollection of folklores and folksong is telling, for it allows us to ponder how mnemonic traditions of folklores and myths are associated with statecraft, and to further consider how such traditions are viewed by individuals in contemporary times. In addition, Aw's project also helps overcome the heroic/gothic binary, holding in balance the manifold relations of power as a shaman does. As Nandy puts it, a shaman in our time "remains the ultimate symbol of authentic dissent, representing the Utopian and transcendental aspects of the child, the lunatic, the androgynous, and the artist" (Nandy "Shamans" 266). In light of this logic, Au's metaphor of a shaman arguably deciphers official history using a *gotong-royong* spirit, one that mediates between voices from various arenas, and further deconstructing and reconstructing them. In her third film, *Pak Tai Foto*, again we will see how Au uses a mnemonic strategy to shine a spotlight on minority voices overlooked by the nation-building project.

Shamanic juxtaposition: A different diaspora in the face of globalization

Unlike the previous works, *Pak Tai Foto* no longer immerses the audience in an imaginary place; instead, it brings us to an actual photo studio located at the heart of Kuala Lumpur. Pak Tai Foto, a photo studio older than the nation-state Malaysia, lies at Jalan Sultan, Chinatown, which hosted the first generation of Chinese immigrants in Kuala Lumpur centuries ago. Ironically, due to the

urban renewal project in recent years, many old buildings and shops on Jalan Sultan have been acquired by the government in order to build mass rapid transit railways. The entire landscape of Chinatown has gone through a rapid transformation over the years, but Pak Tai Foto becomes an “untimely” piece of scenery on Jalan Sultan as it has never undergone any renovation since its opening. The images of Pak Tai Foto studio are thus set in Au’s film like a period of frozen time. At the same time, the audio text showcases the director’s interviews with a few illegal migrant workers who share their “diasporic” experiences in Malaysia. At this stage, the *Mengkerang* project not only highlights repressed memories in Malaysian history, but also manifests social redistributive considerations by featuring some hugely symbolic minority voices. These diasporic voices—unlike the diaspora that many postcolonial scholars celebrate—have neither voices in the current form of the nation-state nor in transnational discourse. With this in mind, Au’s *Mengkerang* collects their experiences and memories, arguing for an emphasis on a different kind of diaspora—that involving transnational labourers. In addition to that, I argue that she once again adopts a shamanic interpretation that mediates different power struggles by juxtaposing various visual and vernacular encounters in her film.

Setting the interviews of migrant labours against Pak Tai Foto studio is an interesting exemplary juxtaposition, for Chinatown was once home to earlier generations of the Chinese diaspora. These migrants put down roots in Nanyang and were granted citizenship after the country gained independence. However,

since the normalization of the nation-state system, our views on current migrant labourers have changed significantly. Au takes note of this changed attitude, and thus underlines in her *Mengkerang* project these absent voices and lived experiences that have been excluded from the national narrative. For her, these voices constitute an important portion of the collective memories of all Malaysians, and thus contribute to a common culture. Moreover, their stories are often overlooked in the current urban development discourse, even though they are the ones who made-built that landscape in its current form, using their bare hands.

It is important to note that Au projects a faceless image of these migrant workers not only as an aesthetic choice that figures their “absent” presence in the country, but also as a political gesture. These illegal migrant workers who constitute a large part of the current population of Malaysia are a group of illegal existence. And, intriguingly, in reality Pak Tai Foto is popular with the police forces in that area as many of them like to take their identification photos there. The owner of Pak Tai showcases a bunch of these photos in his studio, and Au’s camera scans through these stern-looking “seekers” of justice and “preservers” of the peace in concert with the background voices featuring the illegal workers. By staging the interviewees’ emotional stories at the centre of its configuration, Au creates an emphatic link between the audience and migrant workers who struggle with economic and political injustice.

In particular, *Pak Tai Foto* features a handful of migrant workers from Bangladesh, Myanmar and China who earn their living from physical labour in construction works and from sex transactions. Most of them have been working in Malaysia for years; some express their eagerness to return to their homeland, while some aspire to go to a more democratic country such as the United States. In the interview, they share their reasons of leaving home, the prices they pay for coming to Malaysia, and an “ideal” place where they want to be in the future. Furthermore, they are asked about their favourite song from childhood. Their stories reveal the voluntary or involuntary movement of population in Asia, disclosing the cruel human-trafficking industry in the region. For example, Aung Myat Thu, a Burmese worker, came to Malaysia with a Bangladeshi agent’s promise that he would receive a monthly salary of 1200 Ringgit, but ends up receiving only 200 to 300 Ringgit per month. When he and his fellow workers ask about the salary, they are beaten up. Another heartbreaking example is Ying, a sex worker from Guangzhou, who lost all her money in the gambling city Macau and then came to Malaysia to work as prostitute. Touchingly, she cries when she says that she has no “face” (the Chinese expression of *mianzi* 面子) to return to her home in Guangzhou, although everything she loves is there and she never feels secure in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, Au does not intend to project them as miserable subjects who do not have a life. Instead, she let them talk about their dreams of the future and their favourite songs. One Burmese interviewee who speaks simple English

talks about his aspiration to go to New York, the most democratic place in the world as he sees it. Ying, on the other hand, sings the communist song “The East is Red” (東方紅), which she remembers from her childhood. The songs that they sing share the folk values manifested in the “Chan Mali Chan” that Pak Wang sings. In this regard, Au once again examines the politics of memory making to emphasize the cultural identity that every individual holds on to. All interviewees in the film speak in their mother tongues or in grammatically incorrect Malay or English, which manifests the multilingual realities of Malaysia. This multilingual reality, however, is not recognized by state authority as can be seen in its language politics; and the plight of the migrant labourers is often neglected by ordinary citizens who have xenophobic feelings towards them. Au importantly suggests that the everyday linguistic experience in our surrounding lives contribute to a multilingual common culture in Malaysia. In other words, these voices are part of the socio-linguistic construction of Mengkerang, or Malaysia. In doing so, she stresses the importance of a multilingual practice following what Yasemin Yildiz calls a “postmonolingual condition”, in which the language and ethnicity can be “delinked” (Yildiz 17). If we can recognize this multilingual reality and question the current politics of language in Malaysia, it is possible that we can begin to overcome the monolingual paradigm of one ethnicity, one language—a phenomenon that has existed in Malaysia for a long time.

By stressing the politics of memory and language, *Pak Tai Foto* arguably tackles the dilemma of capitalist modernization and globalization. It showcases the coexistence of the unchanged past (the studio) and the flow of migrant population in the face of capitalism. On the one hand, Pak Tai Foto studio can be seen as an untimely resistant force to the modernization project, one that freezes the time-space of Malaya in the 1950s. It witnesses the rapid change of Kuala Lumpur yet it remains the same space as it was in the golden era. On the other hand, the stories of migrant workers reveal the alienation of human beings caught in capitalist migration flows. They indicate uneven distribution of capital and human nature corrupted by the globalization process. The juxtaposition of the studio and labourers highlight problematic developmentalism in Malaysia, which in effect neglects minority voices. Moreover, the “minority” that has been emphasised here is to be read in terms of both class and ethnicity. They are ethnic minorities and also social class “minorities”. To mediate through the categories, Au arguably employs a shamanic interpretation to hold different polarities in balance. *Pak Tai Foto* thus summons collective memories of the residents in Mengkerang, serving as a shamanic means to articulate dissent and resistance.

In my opinion, Au Sow-yee’s works successfully push the limits of the post-1969 ethnic paradigm in Malaysia, making it crumble. She unsettles the sense of place and identity in the problematic formation of the nation-state, bringing in a broader range of voices, including transnational labourers who have low status in civil society, not to mention in literary and artistic circles. Her

works take us on a journey to examine the more urgent, critical social issues affecting the Third World, unraveling oft-neglected social problems that literary scholars overlook, or pretend not to see. Migrancy and exile, as pointed out by Edward Said, are “neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible”:

at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience at first hand; but to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as “good for us”. (Said “Reflections” 174)

In other words, migrant worker exiles in the Third World are not to be seen as beneficiary for the country of residence as well as for the workers themselves. Au places a spotlight on their uneasy existence in Malaysia, and attempts to fill a gap in the current literature that overlooks their presence by infusing into it the voices of these workers. By staging them in her *Mengkerang* project, Au arguably reminds us that these immigrants are also part of the common culture and multilingual realities of Malaysia. That is to say, they have a part in the memory and “daily lives” celebrated by its imagined community and stories, and they should be granted cultural citizenship, which allows their cultural differences to be accepted by the nation without reservations. This appeal is done at the level of basic human rights rather than on the grounds of political demands.

As a whole, Au's Mengkerang project intervenes in the post-1969 national system of Malay supremacy by extending an in-depth examination of the politics of memory embedded in the imaginings of nation-building. She problematizes the state's capitalist modernity ideology and recollects voices marginalized by its nation-building project, including those manifested in the Malay *adat*, in local myths, by the communist resistance and by transnational labour operating in contemporary times. In doing so, she uses the metaphor of the shaman as a symbol of resistance to decipher and unsettle the dominant politics of knowledge, summoning up a collective "memory" of a heterogeneous, multilingual Malaysian heritage and reality.

Summary: Uncover the ethnic veil of Cold War residues

To sum up, Chuah Guat Eng and Au Sow-yee come from relatively different cultural, generational and linguistic background, yet their literary and cinematic productions work in concert with each other, aiming to capture commonalities and create a common culture in Malaysia. They endeavour to overcome the post-1969 ethnic paradigm, which has been the dominant protocol in contemporary discourse. In doing so, they employ a helicopter view of the political and cultural arena of Malaysia, and at the same time they zoom in on the psychosocial dimension of individuals. This method allows them to examine the limitation of the dominant discourse, and to offer an alternative counterdiscourse. They pay attention to the "common" culture of Malaysia, one

shaped by different cultures, by *adat*, by the pursuit of modernity and by social distributive goals, examining the politics of memory embedded in the imaginings of nation-building. I argue that the works of Chuah and Au can be read as “memory texts”, that is, as texts that summon the collective memories and memory-dependent knowledge of Malaysian cultural heritage and reality. In her works, Chuah Guat Eng criticizes the ethnic paradigm and failed justice system operating in contemporary Malaysia. By staging the psychological dilemmas of Hafiz—the representative of the bumigeois community who benefits from the NEP—she arguably breaks up the ethnic paradigm. In so doing, she allows herself to probe into underlying social problems caused by uneven development, by the unequal distribution of capital, and by the modernisation project’s disregard of indigenous knowledge. Au Sow-ye, from another direction, draws on an imagined utopia called Mengkerang, in which self-defined residents narrate their own imaginaries of the nation. She argues against the representations offered by state ideology, reconstructing an imagined community starting from the grassroots level. In this regard, she employs Malay cultural symbols such as *gotong-royong* and shamanism to summon the collective memories of Mengkerang residents. By and large, Chuah and Au are alert to the residual Cold War aspects of contemporary Malaysia, and therefore seek to uncover structural problems disguised by the dominant focus on ethnicity in socio-political and cultural discourse. It may be timely as such to explore other

Cold War residues operating in contemporary discourse, and to see how art producers manifest an alternative counterdiscourse through their works.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has traced a range of contemporary Sinophone and Anglophone literary and cinematic texts of Malaysia. Facing the complicated racial politics in the country, it is urgent to break through the ethnic paradigm in literary analysis. Such a point of view does not mean to ignore the radical racist policies and racialised political remarks that continue to haunt the country, but rather pays attention to the structural construction of such an ethnic paradigm. Also, it reveals overlooked power struggles hidden under the racialised narratives, such as the problems covered by the Cold War. This also challenges the state's legitimacy of using the symbol of the May 13 racial riots as a scaremongering tactic.

In Chapter One, I have explained why situating Malaysian literature in the context of the Cold War is important, and how relevant it is to redefine the historiography of the Cold War by using the terms and stories from the peripheral regions. Following that, I juxtaposed the two historical lacunas in Malaysia, namely the year of 1948 and 1969, for they arguably represent two crucial moments during the Cold War, which allowed, what Agamben calls, the "state of exception" to function. In such a state, the authoritative powers suspend the rule of law, and thus preventing the legacies of colonialism and imperialism from being critically pondered on. In this regard, I contended that Malaysia has yet to undergo a genuine decolonization. The lacunas also represent the void

history of the masses who had been silenced by the colonizers and state authorities in the name of anti-communism.

To grapple with the ethnic paradigm, I argued that it is urgent to “delink” ethnicity and language in Malaysia, and thus offered a comparative analysis of literatures from two linguistic spheres by referencing the theory of poetics of Relation. This also acted as a challenge to the state-led “monolingual paradigm”, which overlooks multilingual and multicultural realities in Malaysia. For multiculturalism, I tried not to succumb to a neo-liberalist account of the unreflexive and “exotic” multiculturalism in the pace of globalization. For this reason, I argued that nation-state is alive and used as a mechanism to investigate the structural and historical problems instead of focusing on the popular discourse of “transnationalism”, “postnationalism”, “diaspora” et cetera. By positioning a nation-state-based understanding, we are able to reveal how literary actors perform their national imaginings and connect the aesthetic *and* the political in their poetic articulations.

Chapter Two focalized the historical lacuna of the 1969 racial riots to examine how Sinophone writer Li Zishu and Anglophone writer Preeta Samarasan have responded to this juncture through their literary interventions. They construct what Raymond Williams calls an “in-process structure of feeling” of the “post-1969” generation who grew up in the shadow of racist policies. Both of them employ a gendered critique to call into question the ethnic paradigm, while Samarasan pushed the critique even further to also address the

neglected class problems. In the chapter, on the one hand, I argued that Li Zishu fails to offer a counterdiscourse to official historiography even if she adopts the symbolism of 513 throughout the novel, *The Era of Farewell*. Her employment of the metafictional technique involuntarily colludes with the state ideology, in which the post-1969 state capitalism is upheld. Such logic formulates an inability to “bid farewell” to the racialized narrative of 1969. On the other hand, Preeta Samarasan’s *Evening is the Whole Day* supplements the dominant narrative of the 1969 racial riots with the voices of Indian minorities in Malaysia. She unveils the issues of class struggles that have been submerged by the rhetoric of race, while calling attention to gender issues. Moreover, she challenges the monolingual paradigm that confines one language to one ethnicity by reclaiming the “national language” (Malay) as also being owned by the non-Malays. In short, both Li and Samarasan use different approaches to revisit the significance of 1969 racial riots remembered by the racial minority groups in Malaysia.

Chapter Three examined the postcolonial Gothic narratives of Anglophone writer Beth Yahp and Sinophone writer Chang Kuei-hsing. It argued that postcolonial Gothic texts should explore more pertinent historical issues instead of merely focusing on the colonizer-versus-colonized binarism. In Yahp’s and Chang’s works, the communist history during the Cold War period is staged in a Gothic setting in the jungle, which they use to deconstruct the “common fear”—the stigmatization of the communists. They both use the form of bildungsroman to record the growth of the present generation’s attempt to

understand their historical past. On the one hand, Beth Yahp portrays the return of the repressed in order to reveal the legacies of colonialism. She carefully recounts the metamorphosis of the “Crocodile” to empower the marginalized Other to speak with their own voices. On the other hand, Chang Kuei-hsing revisits the leftist movements in Borneo to unveil the multifaceted colonial and capitalist desires that destroy the revolution. In a significant way, they dismantle the haunted aspect of Cold War history. In so doing, they fill in the historical “lacunas” in Malaysian history to perform reconciliation between the past and the present generation.

Chapter Four traced the narrative mapping of the south seas (Nanyang 南洋) in the fiction of Sinophone writer Ng Kim Chew and Anglophone writer Tash Aw. I examined their different approaches in mapping the spatial history of the region. Ng Kim Chew uses Sinophone language to portray the Chinese Malaysians’ identity dilemma when facing their homeland, Malaysia, and their ancestral land, China. He calls into question the language and cultural fetishism of many Chinese Malaysians as they lament the “loss” of their mother culture. Moreover, he probes into the communist revolution in Malaya and supplements history with fiction and the “flesh and blood” (*xierou* 血肉). In comparison, Tash Aw offers a de-Orientalized account of narrative mapping. His *Map of the Invisible World* examines the *Konfrontasi* movement between Indonesia and Malaysia, revealing the problematic construction of the nation-state in a neo-colonialist

landscape. In so doing, he creates, what Bhabha calls, the hybrid “Third Space” to allow a more inclusive understanding of the contested thoughts and ideologies during the Cold War. In other words, Ng and Aw’s fiction use a cartographic method to connect the symbiotic history and common culture of Southeast Asia.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, reconsidered the Malay *adat* and modernity through non-Malay authors’ imagination in their “memory texts”. I paid attention to their portrayal of “commonalities” or “common culture” in Malaysia. Anglophone writer Chuah Guat Eng probes into the Malay psyche to overcome the post-1969 ethnic paradigm. She portrays the dilemma of the middle class Malays—the *bumigeois*—to unpack the intersections between the components integral to the Malay identity. In comparison, Sinophone filmmaker Au Sow Yee revisits the Malay myths in her “Mengkerang” project and adopts a “shamanic” point of view to decipher the dominant narratives of history. Furthermore, she recollects the voices that are marginalized throughout the nation-building project, and revisits the politics of narrating national heroes or enemies in history. She argues that these minority voices also contribute to a common culture in Malaysia. In short, I examined the politics of memory portrayed in Chuah and Au’s creative works, in which they construct an “imagined community” for people who share collective memories of the Malaysian multicultural heritage.

By and large, this dissertation is the first attempt to engage in a critical comparison of Sinophone and Anglophone Malaysian literature. Nevertheless, I do not intend to merely offer a literary history of the two communities, neither do I wish to “compare and contrast” their features in general terms. Instead, I juxtapose them as “Malaysian literature” that manifest their historical and geopolitical concerns, and deal with problematic issues in Malaysia. This project can be seen as an ice-breaking attempt, and more work still needs to be done in the future to effect communication between the different linguistic spheres in Malaysian literature, as well as to unveil the residues of colonialism and imperialism. Nation, in this regard, remains a lively mechanism for the writers and artists to project their imaginaries on.

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